

# Sight & Sound

Monthly  
Film Review

March

2/6



**PHILIP HOPE-WALLACE**  
**THOROLD DICKINSON**  
**JAMES LAVER**

**SIMON HARCOURT-SMITH**  
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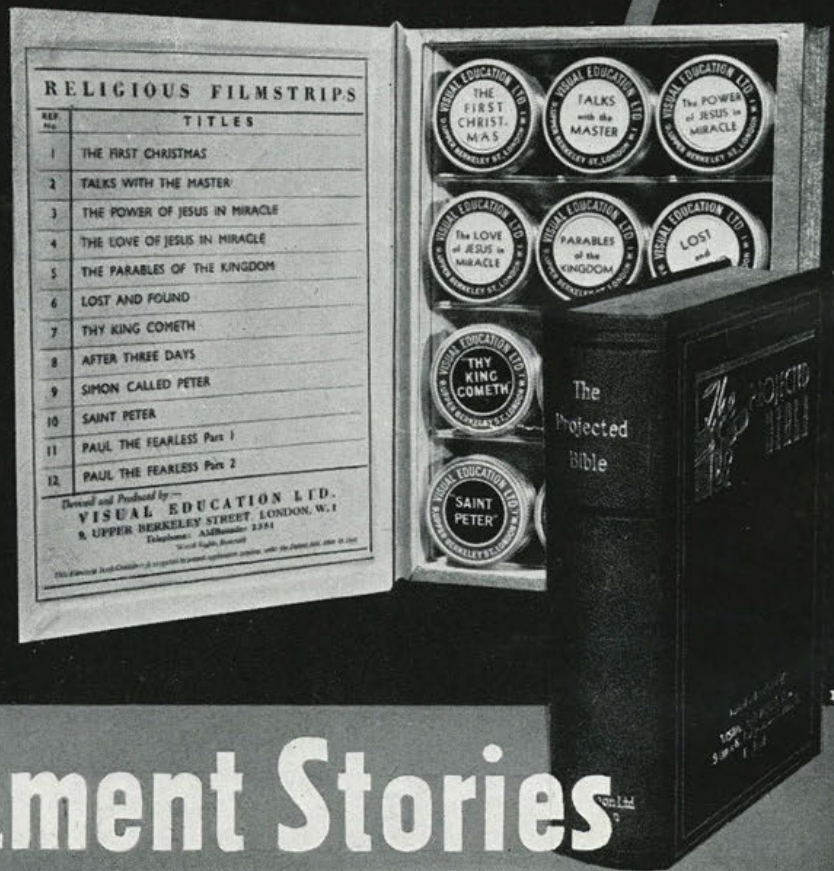
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# Sight & Sound

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ON THE COVER: Anna Magnani in *Vulcano* (see over)

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# The Front Page

IN SIGHT AND SOUND this month will be found a double feature of suppression: two dramas of the victimised, one of major importance, the other perhaps minor, but both symptomatic of the affairs of the cinema to-day. Basil Wright describes an incident which, curiously, has had a minimum of newspaper publicity in this country—the inquiry into the National Film Board of Canada, precipitated apparently by a Communist scare, and resulting in the dismissal of Mr. Ross McLean, the Film Commissioner, in a fashion so summary that it would surely be incomprehensible here. (Mr. McLean was informed of his dismissal by reporters as he entered his office one morning: the decision had been taken the previous night, and he had received no notification.) What may also result, one fears, is the disruption of the Film Board, the liveliest documentary centre in the world to-day, as a creative unit.

Simon Harcourt-Smith writes of *Letter from an Unknown Woman* (which there was space to notice only briefly last month), the latest American film of notable quality to be elbowed out of the circuits and denied a press show or West End premiere. At least, it is in noble company—with Frank Borzage's *Moonrise* (one week at the enterprising Royal, Marble Arch), and *They Live By Night* (rescued for London by the Academy Cinema). None of these films may break box office records but there is no doubt they would be just as successful as a great number of mediocrities sent the rounds, let alone those double bills in which one never quite knows which feature is holding up the other. The stifling of talent at the production end is bad enough: at the distributing and exhibition end it seems even more crass. There is by no means so much work of quality in the cinema to-day that it can afford to reject some of its better achievements.

---

## CONTRIBUTORS

THOROLD DICKINSON. Film director: films include *Gaslight*, *Next of Kin*, *Men of Two Worlds*, *Queen of Spades*. Now preparing *The Mayor of Casterbridge*.

CATHERINE DUNCAN. Journalist and script-writer. Has recently worked with Joris Ivens on *The First Years*.

RICHARD GRIFFITH. Author of *The Film Since Then* in new edition of Paul Rotha's *The Film Till Now*. Now working at Museum of Modern Art Film Library.

SIMON HARCOURT-SMITH. Author and critic. Film articles in various periodicals: fiction reviews for the *New Statesman*: film story, *Miracle in Smoke*, to be produced shortly.

PHILIP HOPE-WALLACE. Critic and broadcaster: drama and opera reviews for *Time and Tide*, radio drama critic of *The Listener*, drama critic of the *Manchester Guardian*.

ANTONY HOPKINS. Composer: many radio features, including *Moby Dick*: opera, *Lady Rothesia*: film, *Vice Versa*.

FRANCIS KOVAL. French journalist and critic: London correspondent of *La Cinématographie Française*.

JAMES LAVER. Novelist, playwright, connoisseur of fashion: Keeper of the Departments of Engraving, Illustration and Design, and of Paintings, Victoria and Albert Museum.

RICHARD WINNINGTON. Film critic-caricaturist of the *News Chronicle*: collected criticisms published as *Drawn and Quartered*.

BASIL WRIGHT. Film maker, producer, and critic. Directed *Song of Ceylon*, *Night Mail* (with Harry Watt), *Children at School*: recently, *Gun Dogs*. Author of *The Use of the Film*.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Stills:

NATIONAL FILM LIBRARY for *Les Visiteurs du Soir*, *Gaslight*, *Next of Kin*, *Liebeleli*, *Macbeth*, *Entr'acte*, the portrait of Clair.

INTERNATIONAL FILM BUREAU for *Vulcano*.

FILM TRADERS for *The Miracle*.

G.C.T. DISTRIBUTORS for *Bicycle Thieves*.

BRITISH LION for *Children of Chance*.

J. ARTHUR RANK ORGANISATION for *The Rocking Horse Winner*, portraits of Margaret Lockwood and Anouk.

HIGH WYCOMBE FILM SOCIETY for *Paper Boat*.

BLUE RIBBON FILMS for *Macbeth*.

REPUBLIC PICTURES for *Macbeth*.

PARAMOUNT PICTURES for *Sunset Boulevard*.

M.G.M. for portraits of Katharine Hepburn, Greta Garbo, Lana Turner, Hedy Lamarr, and *Intruder in the Dust*.

20TH CENTURY-FOX for *Everybody Does It*.

UNIVERSAL-INTERNATIONAL for *Letter from an Unknown Woman* and *East of Java*.

UNITED ARTISTS for the portrait of Jane Russell.

JORIS IVENS PRODUCTIONS for *The First Years*.

UNIVERSALIA for *La Beauté du Diable*.

DISCINA for *Au Revoir, M. Grock*.

SACHA GORDINE for *La Marie Du Port*.

DISCINA and SEQUENCE for *Jour de Fête*.

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## CORRESPONDENTS

U.S.A.: Harold Leonard.

France: Peter Simmons

ITALY: Frances Mullin Clark.



## Magnani

*The great Magnani is to be seen in London at present in Rossellini's new film "The Miracle" (opposite page). She has recently finished a dramatic film about the fisherfolk of a Mediterranean island, "Vulcano," with Rosano Brazzi, directed by William Dieterle.*



# POINTS OF VIEW

THE FILM TRADE is apt to belittle the practical value of criticism (especially when adverse), to claim that press reviews which may condemn a film as socially or æsthetically undesirable have no perceptible effect on its box-office career. Nevertheless, the twentieth century would not be the twentieth century if others did not challenge this cynicism and believe—to repeat a weathered phrase—in the popularisation of culture. To-day, indeed, we can see at almost every London bus stop a poster headed “Art for All”—even though, on closer examination, it turns out to be an advertisement for London Transport prints.

The popularisation of culture is, of course, infinitely tedious to the cultured, who only too often deride it; and it can manifest itself in an odiously patronising manner. But it springs at best from a generous and positive belief that people whose sensibilities, for one reason or another, may be suppressed, are capable with encouragement of responding to the experiences of art and will derive enjoyment from it. It is strange that the cinema, which we are frequently told is the art of the twentieth century and of the people, has such a weak tradition of popularisation. This might at first support the trade’s contention—that the box office alone indicates popular taste, and nothing will change it. But the truth is that (apart from Roger Manvell’s *Film*) no responsible activity on this level has occurred, and it is absurd to expect one Pelican book to cause a mass migration to the Curzon. More likely it caught the imagination of the half-converted and sent them off to join Film Societies; and the Film Society movement, vital and expanding though it is, is only fractional when one takes the wider view.

We have to look at other and more powerful influences—the press and the radio—and see what is being done there. The record is pitifully inadequate. It seems to be limited (apart from a handful of serious critics who have to review films weekly and are therefore seldom able to take a broad view, to extend and recapitulate) to the *Daily Express* Film Tribunal and to the Home Service programme, *The Critics*.

One viewed the original composition of the *Daily Express* Film Tribunal with misgivings. The selection of personnel seemed to have been made from two motives: the need for representing “culture” (Evelyn Waugh, Sir Leigh Ashton, Sir Kenneth Clark) and for popular appeal—Anona Winn, C. A. Lejeune. Obviously only the two film critics appointed (one of whom, C. A. Lejeune, had previously declared that she did not believe in the cinema as an art) could be expected to display any professional knowledge of the cinema; the others would make purely personal contributions—serious, dilettante, cynical—according to their attitude to the cinema.

In view of this the Tribunal’s recent awards for 1949 are not surprising. But they are extremely depressing—depressing, too, in the lack of controversy aroused when, for instance, Sir Leigh Ashton can say simply of *Bicycle Thieves*, “I hated it”, and Lejeune that it did not “rate consideration” because of its “political bias”. The chaotic views on acting are reflected in a dual award to Alec

Guinness (for *Kind Hearts and Coronets*) and Richard Todd (for *The Hasty Heart*). It is with something very like horror also that we read two of Mr. Waugh’s votes for distinguished performances, side by side—Sally Ann Howes in *Fools Rush In* and Enzo Staiola, the child of *Bicycle Thieves*. And Sir Leigh Ashton’s vote for Astaire as the best performer of the year, Waugh’s for *The Chiltern Hundreds* as the best script, can only be considered as deliberately perverse. The only players, in fact, to figure in more than one list were Astaire, Trevor Howard, Anouk and Lea Padovani—and this in a year that included de Havilland in *The Snake Pit*, Magnani in *Angelina*, Walter Huston in *Sierra Madre*, Garfield in *Force of Evil*, Ryan in *The Set-Up*.

Reading the list, it appears that the only two films of “Oscar” standard in 1949 were *The Third Man* and *Bicycle Thieves* (the former wins by 5 votes to 1). There is no mention anywhere, even in the published list of notable films generously placed “on record”, of *Louisiana Story*, *Queen of Spades*, *They Live by Night*, *Pinky* or *Goupi Mains Rouges*.

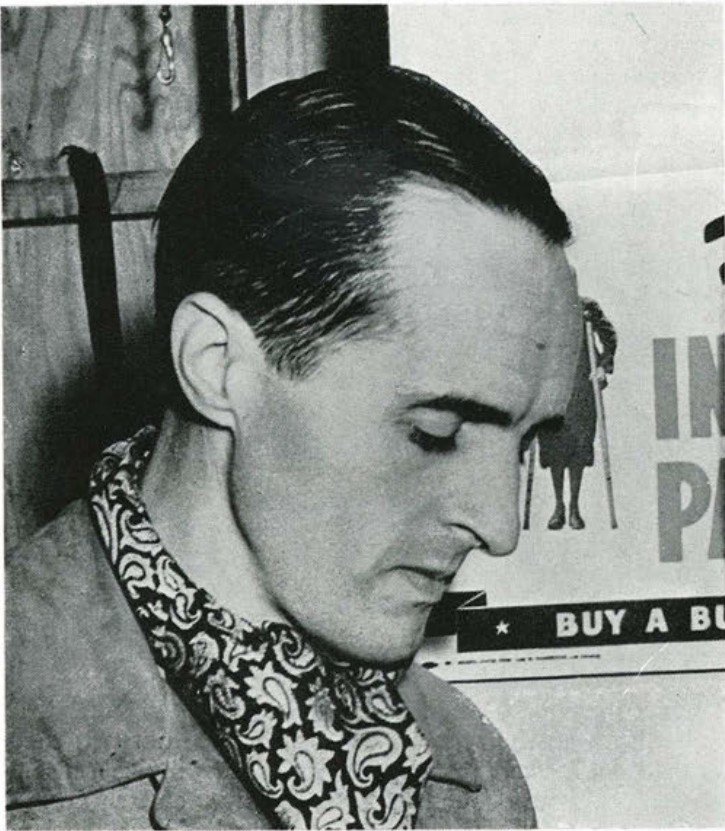
It is difficult to state with certainty the reasoning behind this. The omissions (no more odd than some of the inclusions) may sometimes be due to the fact that members of the Tribunal—the film critics excepted—had not seen enough films. The fact remains that the *Daily Express*, a newspaper with a very large circulation, has set up this Tribunal with considerable pretensions, stocked it with figures whose other attributes are perhaps impressive enough to disguise their lack of experience in judging films, and the standard it is setting is deplorably misleading.

The ten minutes or so given to films each Sunday morning on the Home Service in *The Critics* is an altogether less pretentious affair, since it is more random, more obviously personal. Aimed at a wide audience, it clearly tries to supply a little instruction wrapped up in entertainment value. (The almost hysterical laughter with which members receive even the palest joke suggests a terror of becoming too “serious”.) As a result, not much of value is said at all. Personal opinion obscures critical judgment, there is a lack of absolute standards: a speaker declared during a recent discussion of *The Rocking-Horse Winner* that he preferred it to *Bicycle Thieves*—and this astonishing remark was calmly received and challenged only in the most genial terms. At other times, a good film lacking, some mediocre work is brought up for patronage, so ingenuous and so typed that it can be amusingly praised as “traditional”. The pity is that the programme utilises a number of excellent critics, a sympathetic chairman, and there is obviously material for real discussion.

Presumably guidance from above ensures the level of the programme, and this level is chatty and polite. Judgments are offered almost as personal foibles—so that, in a discussion of *The Cure for Love*, somebody actually said that perhaps a failing of the film was that it was not a film at all; in fact it was indifferently made, its sets were artificial, its acting theatrical. This was received as an interesting point of view. *The Critics* may be cosier, but it is scarcely more helpful.

# INTERVIEW WITH CLAIR

Francis Koval



MY ADMIRATION for René Clair seems to date back to a very remote time when I didn't even know of his existence. In fact, the strongest impression of the silent cinema imprinted on my mind has been created by the serialised adventures of Judex—the romantic detective invariably performing his heroic deeds in a black cloak and wide-brimmed hat—which in my early schooldays I feverishly followed week by week. Only recently did I discover that Louis Feuillade, the director-producer of that thrilling series, had at the time a young assistant who was none other than René Clair, although then still known under his real name, René Chomette.

So I must have had a first inkling of the famous René Clair touch that later captivated millions of cinemagoers—or so, at least, I flatter myself . . .

At that time the young man, born in Paris in 1898, was far from famous. After having tried his hand at journalism, he quickly changed over to the cinema, then in its infancy, and acted in a number of long forgotten films as “jeune premier”. However, apart from the experience he gained, this was of no consequence. Nor was the first film he directed in 1923: *Paris qui dort* with Albert Préjean.

*Entr'acte*, made in 1924, is generally considered the beginning of his career. This was a period of extravagant and revolutionary movement in art, such as sur-realism and dadaism, which did not leave the enthusiastic director untouched. In fact, if there ever was a “sur-realistic” film, this is one; and this is why it has become a classic example of a “film sans sujet”, a turning point in the history of the

cinema. Specifically produced to be sandwiched between two parts of a highly modernistic ballet (*Les Ballets Suédois*, produced by Rolf de Maré), the picture reveals in choreography the dream of a man after an evening at a fair-ground.

With this first noteworthy achievement René Clair not only astonished artistic circles with the unusual powers of his imagination, but also showed a particular instinct for the dance movement that was to become in one way or another a prominent feature in all his future films. It comes especially to the fore in his second “classic”, *Le chapeau de paille d'Italie*, which culminates in the famous “lancers’ quadrille”, the talk of the day in the Paris of 1927. This emphasis on the dance rhythm and the expressive gesture is not limited to dance sequences, but runs right through all the René Clair pictures becoming—as it were—his “signature tune”. It is most noticeable in his ever-repeated pursuit scenes like, for instance, the unforgettable double chase in the attic, the climax of *Le Million* (made in 1931).

For Clair the cinema was essentially a visual art, a composition of lights, shadows and movements, that is, of elements perfectly fit to explain an action and convey a meaning. Hence the scarcity of titles in his silent films, to which the word was something extraneous. The intrusion of sound into this clearly circumscribed art-sphere was most disturbing to him. His reaction was similar to that of Charlie Chaplin (with whom he has certainly more than one feature in common), and at the advent of the “talkies”—with all their abuse of the newly-discovered sound-track—he seriously considered abandoning the cinema.

Seen in this light, the enormous success of his first sound film seems almost paradoxical. *Sous les toits de Paris* delighted the world with the subtle flavour of its unadulterated folklore and the charm of its music, but it also showed the world that sound could be kept in its place and need not conflict with the pictorial values of cinematic art. Weren't the silent fight by the railway siding or the violent (but unheard!) discussion photographed through the window-pane of a café among the most impressive sequences?

Despite this triumph, and that of *À Nous la liberté* and *14 Juillet*, René Clair still remained somehow *la bête noire* of producers, who decried his unruly independence and his revolutionary methods as highly dangerous. No wonder then that after the commercial failure of his next picture, *Le Dernier milliardaire*, he preferred to look elsewhere and came to London, to make *The Ghost Goes West* and *Break the News*.

His activity in America during the war is a new chapter again, marred by a continuous struggle against conventional ideas and the all-pervading atmosphere of mass-production. In *The Flame of New Orleans* and *I Married a Witch* particularly he proved that his personality remained unsubdued.

Back in France in 1946 he began work on *Le Silence est d'or*, the Maurice Chevalier film, awarded the Grand Prix at the Brussels Festival in 1947. Even so, to many of René Clair's admirers this last work seemed a little disappointing, uneven and not really worthy of the great Clair tradition.

This is, of course, the curse of a high reputation that every achievement is measured not by absolute standards but by the yard-stick of previous achievements.

This unique story of an artistic individuality I pieced together as I talked to René Clair in the Rome studio, on the set of his new film. It was an informal talk, hovering haphazardly over memories of the past and punctuated by names of common friends. Only then it suddenly occurred to me that his film-making had left a deeper imprint on the individuality of the British cinema than one commonly realises.

For instance: George Périnal, the foremost lighting expert of the Shepperton Studios, in his early days handled the camera on the sets of *Sous les toits de Paris*, *Le Million*, *A nous la Liberté* and *Quatorze Juillet*. Edmond T. Gréville, who is directing films in this country now, once acted as Albert Préjean's partner (or rather antagonist) in *Sous les toits de Paris*. George Auric, whose music is a by-word in British films now, started his career with an acting part in *Entr'acte* and proved his talent in the musical score of *A nous la Liberté*. Talking recently to the director of *Passport to Pimlico*, Henry Cornelius, I discovered that in 1936 he had been working as editor on *The Ghost Goes West*. With some patient research one could probably find more examples of the same kind.

With all the subtle humour and sometimes biting satire underlying René Clair's films I somehow expected to find this spirit reflected in the expression of his face. But while he spoke I looked in vain for a twinkling of his eye that would betray playfulness or lighthearted abandon. Instead I got the impression of a man fanatically devoted to his work and in an uncanny way conscious of the effects he wants to achieve.

As I watched him directing a few scenes of his new picture, *La Beauté du diable*, I had the feeling that he didn't lose sight for a moment the vision once created in his mind

and with a dogged determination strove to accomplish what he considered perfection, never accepting the second best. When I later interviewed the principal actors working for him at present, Michel Simon, Gérard Philipe and Nicole Besnard, they all confirmed my impression.

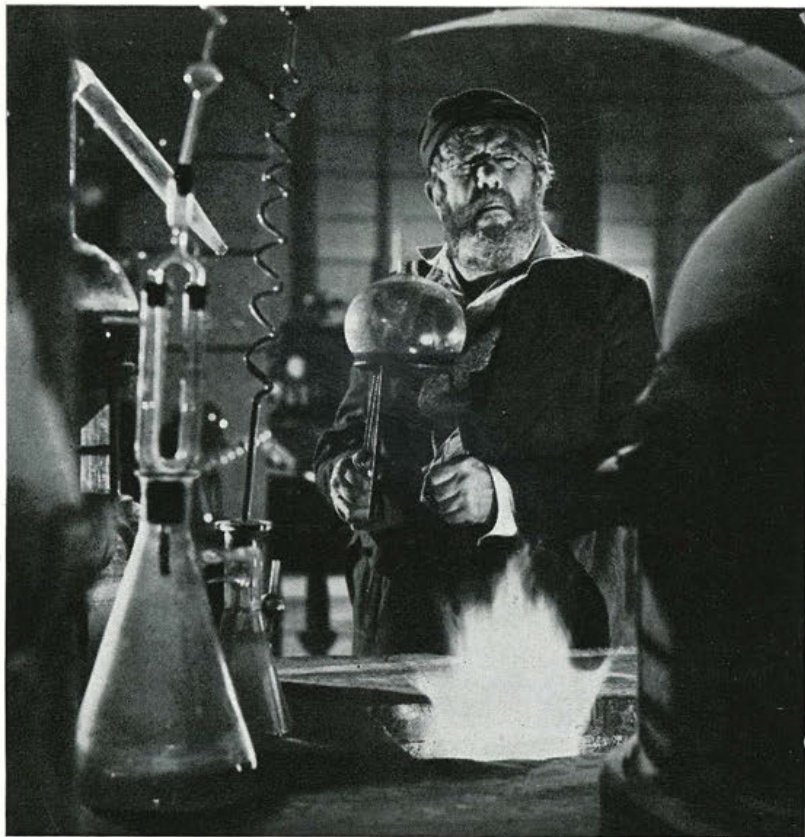
Although René Clair's pictures always strike the audience by their apparent easiness and lightness of style, this result is achieved by extremely hard work and the most meticulous preparation imaginable. In Rome, where the work in the studios usually begins rather late, René Clair—to the great astonishment of the technical personnel—arrived as a rule several hours before the scheduled time of the takes and shut himself up in his specially constructed movable cabin, whose door was permanently adorned by a "Do Not Disturb" poster. And there he was still sitting and working out details of the following day's work long after everybody had gone home.

The title *La Beauté du diable* has in French a flavour of ambiguity that is lost in the literal translation, *The Beauty of the Devil*, because idiomatically this expression describes the attractiveness of a girl in the freshness of her unspoiled youth. When I asked René Clair for the suggestion of an English title, he was at a loss to find one off-hand as he had not given the matter any thought yet. But he was in no way reluctant to discuss at length the idea and the story of his film.

"The old tale of Dr. Faust has always fascinated me", he said, "but I always objected to the lack of logic in this nordic legend, which I attribute to its Germanic origin. So when I invited my friend Armand Salacrou to collaborate with me on the script, I pointed out to him that the Latin people have a great reputation for their logical sense, and that we would have to detach ourselves entirely from the Goethe or the Marlowe version and to reconstruct the story on logical lines. In the end we only kept alive the three principal characters: Dr. Faust, Mephistopheles and



"*La Beauté du Diable.*" The rejuvenated Faust (Gérard Philipe) enjoys the corruptions of luxury.



*"La Beauté du Diable." Mephisto (Michel Simon) discloses the secrets of alchemy.*

Margaret, but have written around them a plot of our own, not dramatic in the conventional sense, but rather in a humorous key. The slightly ironical or satirical approach to supernatural happenings opens a wide field for allusions to the happenings of to-day . . .

"The first logical mistake that I want to correct concerns the question of what actually happens with old Dr. Faust from the moment that Mephisto rejuvenates him and so creates in the young Faust an entirely new person. Does the outside world accept this change as a matter of course? Doesn't anybody enquire about the disappearance of the old scientist?"

"But there exists a much more serious contradiction in the story which I want to eliminate. In all the known versions of the legend the struggle between the Devil and the man thirsting for power and knowledge is a very short one. It is just sketched out briefly, like in the opening scenes of the Goethe or Marlowe play. Is Mephisto's victory convincing in these circumstances? Faust is a highly-learned intellectual, dissatisfied with hypothetical solutions offered by theology, probably an atheist driven to seek recourse in black magic by his disbelief in God. When his experiment succeeds and the Devil suddenly appears, he should be shaken by this proof of God's existence. His well-trained intellect couldn't draw but one conclusion from this phenomenon. Can there be Hell if there is no Paradise? Instead of this he meekly submits to Mephisto's demands and after a bit of haggling, signs the pact—not under duress, but of his own free will . . . I cannot for a moment agree with this conception!"

"My own Dr. Faust who never has known the joys of youth and of love is tempted by Mephistopheles, but doubts his powers and defies him to give a proof. Mephisto

does this by transforming the old professor into a young and impecunious student, Henri, who in due course falls in love with Marguerita, a poor gipsy girl, played by dark-haired Nicole Besnard and quite different from any "Gretchen" or "Margaret". As the disappearance of old Dr. Faust (played by bearded Michel Simon) has caused some alarm, and the young Dr. Faust (Gérard Philipe) has been seen leaving the house at the critical time, he is promptly accused of having murdered the old professor, and imprisoned. In court, overwhelmed by the prosecutor's questions, he soon realises that nobody will believe his story if he tells the truth and consequently he is doomed. At the crucial moment Mephistopheles saves him by appearing in court in the guise of old Dr. Faust. He is enthusiastically welcomed back at the University, where nobody notices the substitution, while Henri is set free but left to his own resources, without money, without papers, without friends.

"Having thus proved to Henri that youth alone is of no value, if money and powers are lacking, Mephisto reveals to his protégé the secret of transforming sand into gold. He makes him almost over night the most successful and most popular man in that imaginary 19th century dukedom, in which the story is set. Now that Henri has acquired a taste for fame, luxury and an easy life—the Devil, following his carefully prepared plan, suddenly takes it all from him, leaving him in utter misery. But one stroke of the pen can, of course, restore everything. Who could resist the temptation in such circumstances?"

"When young Faust repents and in his despair refuses to have any further dealings with Mephisto, the latter flies into a rage and uses all his powers to avenge himself still on earth, always firmly believing that the pact signed in his moment of weakness secures for him Faust's soul for ever. His over-confidence, however, proves his undoing in the end. Events take an unexpected turn, and after a spectacular chase of the presumptive professor Faust by an angry populace, the infernal messenger just saves his skin by a black magic disappearing trick . . ."

Hearing this story told with René Clair's native temperament, illustrated by most expressive, though restrained gestures and underlined by the changing expression of his face, gave me at moments the weird feeling of sitting already in front of the screen and watching one sequence follow another in an entrancing breath-taking rhythm.

But, of course, there is many a slip between the script and the floor, and many a hitch between the cutting-room and the press-show. René Clair, a merciless critic of his own work, is the last one not to recognise the pitfalls. He therefore particularly appreciates the great freedom left to him by the Italian producer Salvo d'Angelo. In a very polite way he draws a comparison with the technically far better equipped Hollywood studios, and the remarks sound rather flattering—for Rome.

As I am about to say good-bye and to leave the director's tiny den, my eyes rest for a moment on some sheet-music spread out on the desk. Under the scribbled headline, "La Bellezza del Diavolo", and the signature of Roman Vlad, the composer, I notice the titles: "Balletto delle Ragazze Peccatrici" ("Dance of the Wicked Wenches") on one sheet, and "Quadriglia del Professor Faust" on another. And I depart with the feeling that this may become another vintage film of René Clair's.

# ROME—PARIS—HOLLYWOOD



"Children of Chance," a new British film made on location in Italy by Luigi Zampa.  
Cast includes Yvonne Mitchell and Patricia Medina.

## ROME

### New Directions

DURING THIS last year Italy has been busy signing agreements with other countries and netted in France, the Argentine and Denmark, and to a lesser degree, Germany, Britain and the U.S., with plans for co-production or distribution. This stems from an understandable desire to strengthen Italian overseas sales, which now outstrip Britain's. The outcome is a diffusion of Italy's own production as the original brilliant little core now spreads out loosely in all these countries, while scores of foreign directors and players descend upon Rome.

After *Cagliostro*, followed by *The Prince of Foxes* (both with Orson Welles), the first American film to be made in Italy, a new version of *Quo Vadis* is planned with Mervyn LeRoy as director. This picture will introduce the use of Technicolor to Italian technicians. William Dieterle has just finished making *Vulcano*, with Anna Magnani, and it is reported that William Wyler will soon be on his way over from the States. Orson Welles, who only clambered out of costume for *The Third Man*, is back in it for his interpretation of *Othello* recently completed in Venice.

From Austria comes G. W. Pabst to make two films in Milan. The first one, due to start very soon, was to have had Emil Jannings in the title role of *Bonifacio VIII*, the Pope consigned to Hell by Dante. Geza Radvány, with his cameraman Gabor Pogány, both from Hungary, are making *Donne Senza Nome*, with Vivi Gioi, Françoise

Rosay, Valentina Cortese and Simone Simon, the second of his trilogy which started with *Somenhere in Europe*. Radvány is concerned with the grimmer aftermath of war, and this picture is about the lonely, homeless women of displaced persons' camps.

France has made the most generous contribution to Italian production as a result of the substantial and comprehensive Italo-French agreement. During 1949, Marcel L'Herbier made *The Last Days Of Pompeii* (with Micheline Presle), with the sets and costumes conveniently left over from *Fabiola*, its sister picture. René Clement directed a Jean Gabin film, *La Mura Di Malapaga*, Jacques Becker is signed up to make a picture shortly, and Maurice Cloche has just started *La Portatrice Di Pane* at Cinecittà, with Vivi Gioi and Jean Tissier. *Domani E Troppo Tardi* was recently finished by Leonide Moguy, with the sexual education of adolescent boys as its theme, and Vittorio de Sica in the principal role—his last, he declares, before devoting his time fully to direction.

With this international influx, Italian film makers are starting work elsewhere, especially in Egypt, the Argentine and Spain. De Sica is going to make a film in Hollywood later on this year, and Marcel Pagliero now works in Paris. Lea Padovani, Valentina Cortese, Alida Valli and Anna Magnani are all working, or plan to work, outside Italy. It is not yet possible to estimate how such a sudden and widespread foreign influence will affect Italian films themselves, though it is easy to speculate.

FRANCES MULLIN CLARK.

# PARIS

## The Current Season

TWENTY-FOUR NEW FRENCH FILMS and one re-issue were shown here during the last quarter of 1949. The majority of them were very average commercial productions with little or nothing to recommend them, and the period contained no work of really outstanding merit, with the possible exception of *Les Casse-Pieds*. Among the best were, apart from this film, *Occupe Toi d'Amélie*, *Rendez-Vous de Juillet*, the Franco-Italian production *Au Delà Des Grilles*, and *Le Roi*.

Most popular with the public was *Gigi*, which had one of the record attendances of the year with nearly 358,000 entries in eight weeks. *Gigi*, an adaptation of a sentimental novel by a popular female author, Colette, is set in the early 1900's and recounts the intrigue—fostered by her mother and aunt—of a naïve, innocent young girl with a suave, rich man-about-town whom she finally marries. The appeal of the film lies mainly in Danièle Delorme's performance as Gigi; she expresses the young girl's changing moods—tender, loving, innocent, capricious, sulky—with unusual freshness and sensibility. Yvonne de Bray as the aunt is splendidly in character. The direction, correct but rather heavy-handed in its period atmosphere, is by a woman, Jacqueline Audry.

Also "period" is Claude Autant-Lara's lively adaptation of the popular Feydeau farce *Occupe Toi d'Amélie*. Amélie, played with verve and charm by Danielle Darrieux, is an extremely personable young lady of not too difficult virtue. Her lover, believing an old friend to have enjoyed her favours, profits by the former's scheme of fake marriage to deceive a bumpkin uncle and obtain an inheritance, and attempts to trick them into a real marriage.

The characters, who belong rather to the early René Clair family, do well by the brisk, witty dialogue, and the action throughout moves with a fine pace. Max Douy



Danièle Delorme as Gigi.

contributed excellent sets which won the décors award at Cannes.

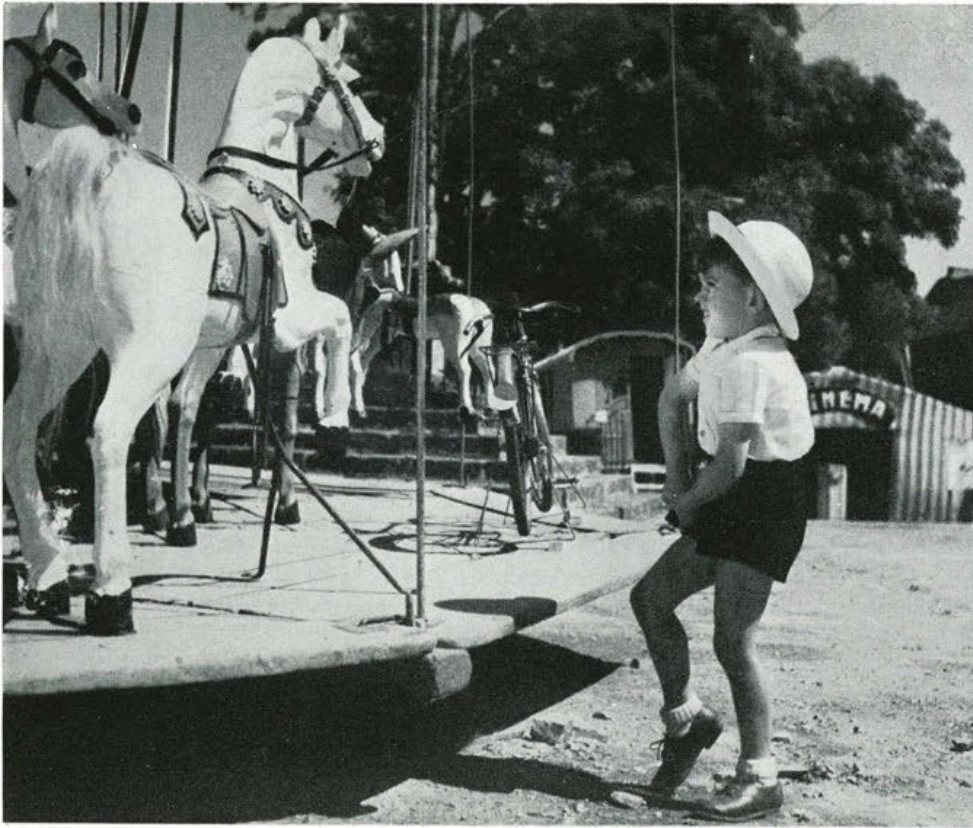
Infidelity and intrigue are also the prime ingredients of another "boulevard" comedy adapted to the screen, *Le Roi*, though here the dose of sentimentality is rather strong. The King is Maurice Chevalier (complete with foreign accent), amiable, amorous ruler of a Ruritanian country. The Chevalier charm of personality seems as intact as ever; the famous smile finds constant employ; and the script has been made sufficiently elastic to include an occasional Chevalier song. The dialogue is often witty, and the settings of this world of luxury residences, gilt mirrors, roses, and fine costumes are mounted with extreme elegance. Marc-Gilbert Sauvajon directed.

The humour of *Les Casse-Pieds* (*Nuisances*) is of a very different nature. This film, which was originally shown at the end of 1948, has been re-issued with minor additions. It is an illustrated "lecture" by Noel-Noel (who wrote the script) of various types of nuisances, presented in the form of a series of sketches. There is the woman who calls to see us "just for two minutes" when we are frantically busy and stays chattering for an hour; the person who always telephones at mealtimes; the practical joker; the man who comes to repair the gas meter just as we are expecting an important feminine guest . . . and many more.

Extremely clever and effective use is made of trick shots—pictures that come to life; sudden disappearances and re-appear-



The great Groucho appears in a film about himself, "Au Revoir, M. Groucho."



## Jour de Fête

*"Jour de Fête," a new French comedy, arrives soon in London with a great advance reputation. It introduces a new comedian, Jacques Tati (centre, with bicycle, below), who also directed the film.*



ances; quick motion, and so on. Directed by Jean Dréville, *Les Casse-Pieds* won the prize for the best scenario at the 1949 Knokke Festival and was also entered for the Marianske-Lazne.

The 1949 Louis Delluc prize, awarded by the French critics to the best French film of the year, went to Jacques Becker's *Rendez-Vous de Juillet* (re-edited after its showing at the Cannes Festival). The *Rendez-Vous* is one with *Life*, and the film deals with the reactions of a number of young people as they first come into contact with the problems of starting their careers, breaking away from their parents, or falling in love. Some have their interests centred in the Theatre, others are bent on becoming explorers . . . all belong to the colourful milieu of Saint-Germain Des Près with its bearded, carelessly-dressed students, its taste for hot jazz, its café and night-club life, and its wild parties.

The cast is composed almost entirely of young newcomers to the screen and the general level of acting is high. Yet somehow the central group does not emerge as completely authentic and, in the final analysis, perhaps because it lacks a valid emotional climax, the film is disappointing in its total effect.

René Clément was awarded the direction prize at Cannes for *Au Delà Des Grilles*, a Franco-Italian production (which counted as an Italian entry at the Festival). The story is cast in a conventional pre-war mould. In the crowded, colourful port district of Genoa, a murderer escaping from the French police (Jean Gabin, of course) extracts a few brief days of love and content from life with a woman (Isa Miranda) he meets, before the Law engulfs him. The Italian actress Isa Miranda plays her part with an effective simplicity and naturalness, and the young "discovery" Vera Talchi, gives a sensitive and talented performance as her twelve-year-old daughter. Gabin is . . . well, Gabin. The street and dockside scenes, in particular, are beautifully handled, and the photography generally is of a high order.

*Gigi* and *Le Roi* have, of course, reached London; *Au Delà Des Grilles* and *Les Casse-Pieds* are to follow soon.

PETER SIMMONS.

## HOLLYWOOD

### Notes on Macbeth

THE MORE SENSATIONAL, less significant details about *Macbeth* got the usual wide Orson Welles coverage from the beginning: the headlong 22-day shooting schedule; Welles' self-imposed budgetary abasements; the no-star cast—except Welles himself, of course; the frenzied simultaneous scene-shooting, with multiple scenes in progressive stages of readiness and Welles racing unconsumedly from one to the next . . .

After a very tentative distribution in America, the film was withdrawn over a year ago; since then, Welles has re-recorded parts of the soundtrack, which were held to be inaudible when the film was shown at the Venice Biennale in 1948 and got off to a bad start. It is now expected that *Macbeth* will arrive in London and Paris about March.

Here are a few additional details on the production, put down non-consecutively, garnered from day-long visits

to the set during the peak of hostilities, including several meetings with Welles and his production associate Richard Wilson.

There was sincere purpose, one got the impression, in the partly voluntary modesty of Welles' production outlay on the film since he might actually have got himself a more Laurence Olivier-like set-up under different production auspices. But Welles seems to have had several motives in the *Macbeth* adventure, principally to demonstrate to his own and the general satisfaction, the practical viability of classics-derived films for a less than total movie audience if turned out on a drastically curtailed budget. And, parenthetically, insisted Welles, working this was no hardship—there was really nothing they could have wanted to do that their slightly stringent production régime prevented. In fact, in addition to having the time of his life in the sheer excitement of so much action, one can't help suspecting that Welles took immense relish in the prospect of confronting a, to him, never benevolent Hollywood with this enormous feat of economy.

Doing the Shakespearean tragedy at Republic must have seemed piquant to Welles also. A second-rank studio, Republic specialises in Westerns, action pictures and the bargain-basement imitations of the major studios' more popular genres. Things were more than averagely lively at Republic during much of *Macbeth's* time, what with a second major calibre unit—Lewis Milestone's *Red Pony* company—running on among the millions on another stage and helping, incidentally, together with the publicity-rich Welles, to swell the studio's dawning bid for first-rank status.

Probably no film had been more thrifty in its preparation or used its materials, including the editorial, more ways at once: e.g., Economy in Text Preparation: the text used in the film was made essentially for a stage production by the Utah Centennial Drama Festival, Central City, Utah. Cut to little more than an hour and a half, which was to be the length also of the screen version, the stage text was actually planned along the scenario lines so that carrying it over into film was a short step. Economy in Cast Training and Interpretation: stage and film casts having been so nearly identical, it was possible to break in the film's cast on the stage production. Rehearsal Economy: even action rehearsal run-throughs on the set were often made to pay double; time being all important, final rehearsal run-throughs were often done with cameras turning—if the run-through had been satisfactory, the take was printed.

The Utah stage production will not have been Welles' first brush with the play. His well-known "Negro *Macbeth*" dated from 1936—a production, as will be remembered, of the W.P.A. Federal Theatre. Welles did a radio *Macbeth* in the same year; for radio's pioneer experimental series, "Columbia Workshop", he had already made a half-hour (*sic*) adaptation of *Hamlet*, which he did not direct. Following the success of this and his first directorial job on radio, Welles put on a *Macbeth* in two half-hour (really 25-minute) sessions, doing much with rhythmical sound effects, as against realistic sound, and music (the latter specially composed by Bernard Herrmann and scored throughout for trumpets) which, slightly to understate, drew attention. Two years later Welles was adding a wrinkle to an earlier potboiling project, by putting out phonograph-record versions of a group of Shakespearean plays he had published earlier in shortened acting versions for high-school presentation; copies of the Welles-edited



Two scenes from Welles' "Macbeth."

acting versions come as free premiums with the recordings. *Macbeth*, it happened, was not one of the plays included in the already published series of abridgements, so Welles felt free to record a fuller version of it and the "Mercury Shakespeare" *Macbeth*, accordingly, came out on nine 12-in. records (Columbia Masterworks album, #C-33), its 18 sides running approximately 2 hours 24 minutes; it has Miss Fay Bainter in the part of Lady Macbeth and music (cf. the radio version) by Bernard Herrmann.

The cast, surely the year's least conventional, reflected among other things, that wonderful loyalty of Welles to his former Mercury Theatre associates. There are four ex-Mercuryites in *Macbeth*—Erskine Sanford who plays Duncan; Edgar Barrier, Banquo; Brainerd Duffield (both a writer and actor in real life) doubling as First Murderer and the man Witch; and William Alland (another actor-writer) as Second Murderer. And Welles' respect for radio and his own working knowledge of it show, cast-wise, in the assignment of the crucial Lady Macbeth role to a serious-minded radio artist, Miss Jeanette Nolan; of Lady Macduff (and one of the Witches) to radio's "girl with the thousand voices"—Miss Peggy Webber; one of radio's busiest utility actresses, Miss Lurene Tuttle, to the Gentlewoman and the third Witch. Newcomer Donal O'Herlihy, one of the gunmen from *Odd Man Out* and an Irish Abbey and Gate Theatre veteran, makes his initial American appearance as Macduff with rich but manly handsomeness. Christopher Welles, playing Macduff's child, is Welles' nine-year old daughter.

Cameraman Jack Russell wore his stripes as "director

of photography" for the first time with this picture. An operating cameraman on Welles' earlier *The Stranger*, where he had won Welles' interest, Russell made the jump to photographic director under Welles' sponsorship. He has subsequently been responsible for photography in Frank Borzage's notable *Moonrise* from the Theodore Straus novel, at Republic, and in Stanley Kramer's (producer of *Home of the Brave*) first and most interesting film, *So This Is New York*, the Ring Lardner-based comedy featuring sophisticated radio comedian Henry Morgan.

Production stringencies may even be made out to be in part responsible for an overall unity of style which *Macbeth* has in a way that *Henry V* for all its excellences, lacked. Realistic in costume—at least romantically, or costume, realistic—*Macbeth* is played throughout against "impression" backgrounds of a style not uncommon on the stage but new to film. Its half-dozen large, many-faced set-masses, with their parapets, curving steps, arches, in colour a uniform dark grey, make up a kind of unit set against which, with one combination of lighting, camera framing, etc., or another, Welles shot the entire play. Using light-created cyclorama everywhere for sky and above-the-horizon background, Welles gets the starkness and the heroic effect of the silhouetted figures. The monotone austerities contribute to the atmosphere of sheer "Stonehenge-powerful, unrelieved tragedy" that Welles says he is after.

Within the austerity, there are elements of decoration, such as in the dress of the principals. While the costumes of the extras have all too unmistakably the look of the

costume warehouses from which doubtless they came, the dress, notably of Macbeth, of Macduff and Malcolm, has an eye-dazzling distinction which carries it from period costume with its virtues of accuracy, to the perennially greater excitement of fashion, or perhaps we should say, style.

As for colour—colour *was* used, Welles asserts. For the mood they wanted, the colours most appropriate were greys, whites and blacks, conveniently available in black-and-white film.

When Welles said, "I mean this to be heroic", he was speaking of *Macbeth's* style, but it seems clear that other heroisms are contained in this film. Among them the heroism of treating a "classic" in a deliberately non-elegant way—of making an inexpensive film in a community that often measures itself by its budgets—of making a violently passionate film from a passionate play. "I'd like to prove that films of this importance *can* be made on such a schedule and such a budget—maybe someone else will get the idea . . ."

In its production programme, the first year of Howard Hughes' regime at R.K.O., especially after Dore Schary's quick precocities, seemed slow in getting under way, morbidly safe, and, administered by administrators, fairly dreary. Then, last month, came news that Mr. Hughes had placed under long-term contract the legendary but for some years inactive Josef von Sternberg, assigning him a major project (*Jet Pilot*); and one was led to suspect that the intransigent perfectionist of *Scarface* and *Hell's Angels*, the latter-day partner of Preston Sturges, had not mellowed into predictability. Several other recent news items which seem happily to corroborate this persisting no-man's-

collarism, have been:

\*Hughes' assignment of Ted Tetzlaff, ex-cameraman director of *The Window* whom, it now appears, Hughes had not fired during the great deck-clearing, to the direction of *The White Tower* (starring Valli and Glenn Ford), the studio's vicissitudinous but much-expected-of Alpine project.

\*The elevation to director status, with immediate assignment to the psychological mystery *Blind Spot* (Robert Ryan, Claudette Colbert), of actor and legit director, Mel Ferrer. Ferrer it now appears had been under actor-director contract to Hughes for some time—even before Ferrer's present term contract, he had been briefly employed by Hughes for a directorial shot at the much-directed *Vendetta*, scripted by Sturges. With the recent excitement over Ferrer's performance in *Lost Boundaries*, however, Ferrer was able to talk Hughes into upping his position from featured actor, in *Bed of Roses*, to which, in his opinion, he had shamefully regressed, back to the coveted full direction, as cf. above.

\*The hiring, with the talismanic writer-producer title, of a young, virtually unknown, action-picture writer (name of Stanley Rubin) on the pure offchance that his interest in writing topical melodramas—such as *Violence* (1947, Monogram)—combined with the ineluctable talent for practical film-making of a partner in a TV-film-production outfit (Grant-Realm, producing twenty-six in 26 weeks for the American Tobacco Company) would qualify him to head a new low-budget unit in a tradition at R.K.O. made notable by Scott-Dmytryk and Val Lewton.

HAROLD LEONARD.



Gloria Swanson returns, with William Holden, in Billy Wilder's new film about the life of a silent star, "Sunset Boulevard." Von Stroheim is also in the cast.



## Beauty and Pulchritude

*No prizes offered for guessing which is which (see opposite). Top to bottom: Katharine Hepburn, Margaret Lockwood; Anouk, Jane Russell; Wendy Hiller, Lana Turner. Below, right: Garbo and Hedy Lamarr.*



# Second Opinion

## SOME THOUGHTS ON PULCHRITUDE

James Laver

I WAS RECENTLY watching a French film. It was not one of the "classics" but it was very well worth seeing. It had the usual high level of acting and, in addition, that air of verisimilitude, that curious *authenticity* which characterises so much of the work produced by French studios. The type-casting was of a high order, as it always is. One forgot that one was watching actors; one was caught up into the lives of real people.

Now there are excellent character actors and actresses both in this country and in America, and yet one often misses, in the films we produce, this sense of reality, especially so far as the women are concerned. I came to the reluctant conclusion that the reason for this was their excessive beauty. The general level of comeliness demanded by the casting-director is too high.

In real life most people are not beautiful. Beauty has a rarity-value: like an orient pearl, it is seen to best advantage in isolation. In films, it seems to be the idea that, apart from comic charwomen and similar characters, every woman must be well above the average in personal good looks. Perhaps this was the source of the lack of conviction conveyed by so many films, especially those made in Hollywood.

The Hollywood producer, of course, has his answer ready. The general level of female beauty *is* very high in Hollywood. One has only to go into a café to see that every waitress is a possible film star so far as looks are concerned. And, in many cases, that is why she is there. It is because she thought herself beautiful enough to be a film star that she came to *Hollywood*. The film magnate is able to argue that since this is the general level of beauty in life he is justified in maintaining it in his pictures. But Hollywood is not "life" and that is the crux of the matter. It is as if a man should argue that all flowers are orchids and point to the blooms around him, without realising that he is standing in a hot-house.

In France the situation seems to be the exact opposite. Certain individual stars of the French screen have been very beautiful—one has only to think of Danielle Darrieux to realise how beautiful they can be. But they were not chosen chiefly for their beauty: they were chosen because they could act.

In the French film already mentioned the leading actress was not beautiful and there were moments when the cameraman had taken so little trouble with her that she looked downright plain. The effect, at times, was disconcerting, but the general result, the sum total of all the shots in which she appeared, was an astonishing sensation

of reality. And because one accepted the girl as real, one was moved by her tragedy. How often does one find oneself thinking, when some beautiful American actress "loses her man", that it was a lucky escape for her. Why should she waste herself on him? With a face like that she has only to go round the corner and collect a millionaire.

Perhaps beauty is the wrong word. Beauty has always something strange and unexpected about it. Beauty is always new; it is never the repetition of a pattern. Stereotyped beauty is not beauty at all, it is pulchritude; and pulchritude, I suggest, is the curse of American pictures.

In every age there is a norm of pulchritude to which most women try to conform, and sometimes they succeed to an alarming degree. Most "beauties" of the past have a period look and, since the spread of the practice of using cosmetics, this tendency has become ever more marked. Instead of a collection of faces we find a succession of masks, identical masks behind which the variations of personality are completely hidden. Most women are in the position of the theatre manager who thinks that "what the public wants" is a play modelled as closely as possible upon the last success.

In any case, it seems that one woman, almost by accident, sets the standard, creates the type which repeats itself until the new beauty comes along. There is a promising field for investigation here for the social historian and the student of manners. For, as with clothes, so with faces. The *new* beauty very often does not look like beauty at all until it has established itself. It seems, in fact, at first sight rather ugly, like so many new fashions. But very soon it makes the type it is displacing seem dated and old-fashioned.

This is a larger question extending far beyond the limits of "the celluloid world." So far as films are concerned, the problem is a simpler one, although in practice difficult enough. One can hardly imagine the most enlightened casting director turning down an aspirant *because* she was beautiful, but, if he is really far-seeing he would sometimes prefer a candidate whose pulchritude (i.e. her nearness to the norm) was less pronounced. Here the now historical example of the spectacular success of Katherine Hepburn is a warning and a portent. She succeeded because, against a background of pulchritude, she stood out with startling vividness. The wide gash of her mouth suddenly jerked us back to reality. Without this sense of reality there is no conviction, and without conviction we cannot even enjoy the pleasures of escapism. On the screen, as everywhere else, there is no salvation unless we can say, "I believe".

# THE FILMWRIGHT AND THE AUDIENCE

*A Talk to a Film Society*

Thorold Dickinson



*Thorold Dickinson's "Gaslight" (1940). Anton Walbrook and Diana Wynyard.*

THOSE OF US who make feature or story films in this country know that any elements in them that may appeal to the discriminating—subtlety of acting, stimulus to the imagination, any new way of presenting an old idea, or worst of all, any idea that is new to the screen—these elements are a daring luxury in a commercial film. They are daring because they demand some experiment, they take longer to achieve, and time in film production is the enemy of economy. Such elements of discrimination cause endless argument and misunderstanding on the studio floor and demand endless patience in carrying them out. Then if they are not absolutely clear to the normal commercial film audience at first impact, they are cut out of the film. Often the prejudice against them is so great that they are cut before the film is previewed.

Films which appeal to discriminating people are known in the jargon of the film trade as "prestige pictures"; they may create comment which is good for the trade in the long run, but commercially they are regarded as guilty until they can prove themselves profitable. And profitable under the periodical system of three-day or weekly bookings. The film trade does not regard films as if they were single works, each with a possible permanent value: films to the trade are ephemeral periodicals which are all

to be given similar chances of attracting the public. The idea that a film may prove more popular in one neighbourhood than another, and could be given more time and encouragement in one town than another, would clog the great distribution machine which circulates with equal, mechanical tempo anything from *Henry V* to *Old Mother Riley*. Fortunately, in America they had the audacity to give *Henry V* a discriminating showing in few theatres at high prices and did so much better with it that they decided to show *Hamlet* in this country and America in the same manner. After all, there is nothing new in this apparent innovation. That was the way in which D. W. Griffith presented *Birth Of a Nation*. That picture was anathema to the American film industry when it was planned in 1914. They refused to finance or show it. They considered Griffith mad to spend 110,000 dollars on one film, at a time when their average expenditure was five thousand. But by appealing first to the discriminating, Griffith created such an interest in his film that in the end the gross takings amounted to twenty millions.

We must remember that the key to that success was the man Griffith, not the idea, the story or the way it was shown. *The Birth of a Nation* and *Intolerance* introduced or established logically for the first time nearly every device which

was to comprise the technical and artistic equipment of subsequent creators of silent films. Only two others have come near Griffith's stature in the art of the silent film, Eisenstein and Chaplin, and neither of these has held his place in the sound film, nor has any other artist yet risen in sound film who is capable of reaching the heights that these three men of genius achieved in the silent film.

There is nothing derogatory to Griffith, Eisenstein or Chaplin in the fact that they have contributed little to the practical development of the sound film. They reached maturity before sound was introduced and they were by that time beyond the possibility of a further term of genuine apprenticeship. It is impossible to speculate how and when an artist of genius will arise to bring the sound film to fruition and to release it from the bonds of convenience, the conventions, which restrain it to-day. When such a genius does emerge, he will be an artist of even greater capacity, for the sound film is capable of far wider and deeper scope than the silent.

However, we can do something more than sit back and wait for a prophet to appear. We can prepare a regular audience of adequate size to receive and justify the better sort of film, and we can begin by clarifying our views as to how that kind of film production can be attempted. Within the film industry too many craftsmen live too close to their own particular work. They pursue technique and polish, they comb and shine every hair into place, they light and compose every shot like an academy picture, every day's work looks too beautiful and striking, and yet when the whole film is assembled it can be as dead as a doornail. The vital spark is missing. There are so many departments in sound film, and so many more in the colour film, that nowadays there is a genuine tendency to believe that one man can no longer govern the job. My contention is that we must find and encourage the one man who *can* govern the job. For excepting those film makers who hunt in pairs, the sound film is as much a one-man job as any other art.

It is generally assumed by laymen that the controlling influence is the director's. Yet eighty per cent. of story films are subject to that influence at only one stage in their making. Directors in Hollywood are regarded not as creative artists but as interpreters of the created screenplay, which has often been invented by a committee of writers. Roger Manvell, in his Pelican book on *Film*, quotes a letter from Frank Capra to the *New York Times* of April 2nd, 1939, in which he says:—

"There are only half a dozen directors in Hollywood who are allowed to shoot as they please and who have any supervision over their editing. I would say that 80 per cent. of the directors to-day shoot scenes exactly as they are told to shoot them without any changes whatsoever, and that 90 per cent. of them have no voice in the story or in the editing. Truly a sad situation for a medium that is supposed to be the director's medium. All of us realise that situation and some of us are trying to do something about it by insisting on producer-director set-ups, but we don't get any too much encouragement along this line. Our only hope is that the success of these producer-director set-ups will give others the guts to insist upon doing likewise".

In 1939, then, the method behind ninety per cent. of American films was mass-production and the individual approach was a luxury. The good director was occasionally given a small concession by the boss. William Wyler has

told us that Samuel Goldwyn made an exception in allowing him to work on the screenplay of *The Best Years of Our Lives* and to supervise the first editing of the film. Subsequently Goldwyn took charge of the editing and lengthened Wyler's version by thirty-five minutes.

The custom in European production has been to allow the director a much stronger position than in America. But this has largely persisted because of the shortage of experienced producers. The term *producer* has been loosely used to indicate the impresario who raises the money and initiates the production. Nowadays many of these men have gained experience beyond business organisation and like to take a hand in the artistic control as well. But their influence still remains largely economic; they begin by learning that the popular audience follows the star players, they therefore offer the stars contracts, choose their subjects to fit the capacity of their contract players and influence the shaping of their films with like purpose.

Another increasing influence in current production is the screenwriter's. Here we tread on more delicate ground, as anyone who has met a screenwriter will know. There are two categories of writers in films, the rare one who creates original stories and the normal one who adapts other people's works into film terms. The latter is always unhappy because he is despised for being a mere adapter and at the same time blackguarded heavily if he dare draw on his own ideas in an attempt to make an inappropriate subject more filmic. He is then accused of tampering with a classic.

The creative writer seldom has the patience to master the elements of cinema to the full. But if he has any experience in writing dialogue, he can ensure that his intentions are carried out by failing to render his story in visuals and by taking the easier course of telling the story in dialogue only. Here he is enthusiastically supported by the narrow-minded among the economists. It takes far longer and costs far more to visualise a story on the screen than to grind it out in endless talk. There is no doubt that a writer is more interested in the speaking of his dialogue, which is a direct expression of his talent, than he is in any interpretation which the director may give to his descriptions of visual action. This is particularly so in cases where that interpretation may be subsequently influenced by producer and editor and possibly diverted from its original purpose and emphasis by the undue application of sound effects and music: undoubtedly the screenwriter is frustrated in every element of his work except in the direct use of his dialogue. And inevitably in self-defence he likes to compare himself with the playwright and to adopt the same attitude towards the film director as the dramatist towards the stage producer, who is the interpreter of the written play, or the composer to the conductor, who again is the interpreter of his music.

Before pursuing this question of influence further, let us exorcise from our minds this misconceived parallel of theatre and film by supplanting it with the truer analogy of ballet. The successful ballet is initiated by an impresario. Though he may not have written the original scenario (which can be the work of a layman to ballet), the dominant mind in the creation of the ballet is the choreographer. An interpretive mind can later reproduce the original choreography, but even with the eventual development of a ballet script or alphabet like Nijinsky's, the first production of a ballet must always be the work of the original choreographer because of the need to complete the theories



*Thorold Dickinson: "Next of Kin" (1942), with Nova Pilbeam  
and "Queen of Spades" (1948) with Edith Evans (right).*





Early and later Carné: left, Jean Gabin in "*Quai des Brumes*"; right, Alain Cuny and Arletty in "*Les Visiteurs du Soir*."

of the choreography in the practice of rehearsal. The designer of the costumes and settings can only complete his work after studying the demands of the choreography. The function of the impresario is to bend his business management to the best interests of the creative work of his colleagues, and he must possess either sufficient funds to fulfil all their demands or sufficient character to curb them without unduly frustrating them. Impresarios who transcend that function are as rare as diamonds.

Here in ballet exists a close parallel to the proper organisation of a film. Good ideas for films are hard to come by and they may come from anywhere. In a true film the choreographer of the chosen idea is the film director. Jean Benoit-Lévy in his book, *The Art of the Motion Picture*, suggests that he should be called the *author* of the film, and I recently saw the director so described on a Russian documentary film. I would like to introduce the term "filmwright" as a proper title for the creator of films. Because film direction is by nature physically as well as mentally exhausting, the preparatory function of choreographer may be shared by more than one person, particularly in the matter of dialogue writing, which is a gift as special as direction. Hence, while the best silent films were written and directed by the same person, in sound films it is customary for a writer to collaborate to supply dialogue where necessary, and to indicate the visual interpretation of characterisation without which the dialogue would be meaningless.

The subtle balance between director and writer is referred to in an article on Marcel Carné in that enlightened magazine of French entertainment, *Intermède*. When we were starved of French films during the war, the director for whose films I mostly yearned was Marcel Carné. Particularly his two films *Quai des Brumes* and *Le Jour Se Lève* had left a lasting impression on my memory. After the war I sought out his next films, *Les Visiteurs Du Soir* and *Les Enfants Du Paradis*, and I must confess I experienced a deep disappointment. It was not so much that

Carné had suffered a mental and spiritual change: that was to be expected. But his art had changed and to me it seemed a change for the worse. The simplest way to describe this change was that he no longer gave his stories to us through our eyes but through our ears. The enchantment of the eye was gone. He gave good visuals but not dramatic visuals. And his sound track was more literary than dramatic.

Then I read Jean Mitry's article on *Les Enfants Du Paradis* in *Intermède*, and understood what had happened to Carné.

"Obviously, this is a considerable effort. What is more, it is a magnificent spectacle. It is a very great film as much in its scope as in its ambitions, but it is a very great film that has misfired.

"I do not believe that the reasons for this setback are due to Marcel Carné, any more than to Prévert, but rather to a lack of harmony and cohesion in their joint work.

"In the past—when it was a question of works into which they put all their resources, *Quai Des Brumes*, *Drôle De Drame* or *Le Jour Se Lève*—which I take not only to be his masterpiece but one of the rare masterpieces of the French cinema—in the past although the scenarios had always been the result of a close collaboration, Carné had the upper hand in the breakdown into the shooting script and in the cinematographic construction of the film. After Carné had made a suitable adaptation of the subject chosen, and had sketched the main lines of the continuity, Prévert was content to write the dialogue and to fit this into the limited and pre-arranged framework which had already been determined by Carné. The latter, working in terms of cinema, tried to express himself visually and only allowed the dialogue to act as a reinforcing support on which to rest the images and to allow them to take their full value.

"Since *Les Visiteurs Du Soir*, the jobs have been reversed. It is Prévert who conceives the subject of the film, who develops it, writes the continuity and often breaks it down into an extremely detailed form. Carné's job is then

confined to writing into the script the necessary technical notes and to planning the changes of camera angles. They are no longer Carné's films with dialogue by Prévert, but Prévert's films directed by Carné. It is another world.

"Where Carné makes a point visually, Prévert makes his point with words. He allows the visuals the sole purpose of showing, presenting and placing the characters in situations cleverly contrived, but controlled by his text. Hence the visuals empty serve only to identify outwardly characters of whom we know nothing except from what they say; the visuals serve only to illustrate a story whose development is never indicated except in words. The text becomes the pivot, the life, the structure of the film, and the visuals serve as the reinforcing support by showing the shapes which the words represent.

"Thus—and this is the case with *Les Enfants Du Paradis*—in spite of the intelligence of the subject and however ingenious the direction, it is no longer, it cannot be any longer cinema".

While the film became more complex with the addition of the sound track, this complexity is no excuse for discarding unity of artistic control, but only makes a greater and different demand on the resources of the controlling artist. The elements of the silent film are known to us. There is an established literature of the subject, which proves that the most important element in the new art of the silent film was editing, the selection of the shot, the determining of its length and the juxtaposition of shot against shot. Towards the end of the period of silent films, when the cinema was straining towards a deeper articulateness, experiments were made in the dramatic use of titles—of words—to present a positive element in editing. In particular, makers of silent films were struggling to achieve with words what the silent image on its own could not express, subtlety of characterisation. The silent film could never get beyond the simple stage of story-telling in which the people of the play had no more need of names than had the types in a Mediæval morality play. The Boy, the Girl, the Woman of the Streets, the Millionaire, the Mother—and so on. They were all lay figures, bustling about faster than life in the stern or comic purpose of Good and Evil. And as the demand for films grew and with it the commerce of the cinema, and more and different kinds of stories were dragged into the range of the insatiable camera, blunt, unsubtle figures continued to mime and attitudinise on the screen, and imaginative film makers turned to symbolism, and the dull ones used more and more titles, in attempting to deepen the shallows of their art.

Then sound came. Unhappily, difficulties over patents retarded sound on film for a while, and sound on discs, clumsy to use and clumsy to show, drove the cinema back virtually to its inflexibility of the early 1900's. Cinema became again a bastard form of recorded stage drama. And this influence, having proved itself commercially profitable, persisted after the sound disc had given place to the sound track on film. Whole scenes from plays like *Rookery Nook* and *Canaries Sometimes Sing* were acted before four or more cameras as in a public theatre. The system was quite similar to the current process of televising drama. Curiously enough, the system of production used by Hitchcock in *Rope* and to a considerable extent in *Under Capricorn* is only an elaboration of the same dramatic technique, except that he uses one mobile camera instead of several static cameras. In this method the dialogue has to be post-synchronised because the original sound track picks up

extraneous sounds as the action moves from room to room and sometimes up and down stairs from floor to floor. There is naturally a great saving in time costs as compared with the normal film. But there is also a great renunciation of all the rich and varied elements of sound film except the one element of acting performances, to which most of the budget can be devoted.

The asset of editing gave the silent film the advantage of physical freedom in time and space, both of which it could expand and contract at will; but the silent film was incapable of revealing character. The introduction of sound gave the film the mental range of the spoken word and of all recordable sound. But while the sound film can go a long way towards expressing the deepest and most subtle variations of human character, yet by its own nature sound tends to bind the film in time and space. And the more immediate and actual is the sound, the more does it bind visuals to actuality. Think back, for instance, to Eisenstein's sequence of shots on the Odessa Steps in *Potemkin*. In that sequence Eisenstein builds his effect of horror to monstrous proportions by stretching time. His sequence lasts more than twice as long as the event itself if it had been photographed as an actuality in one long shot. Now commit the momentary sacrilege of imagining that sequence accompanied by realistic synchronous sound. The result would be ludicrous, because you would be made aware of the geography of the situation from the start, you would feel that the event was being artificially stretched, and you would resent the director's attitude to you, the audience, in laying on the horror so thick and slab and so interminable. To the untutored audience the enchantment of the silent film lay in its imaginative unreality, its unnatural speed and yet its simplicity of attack in never doing more than one thing at a time. After all, its appeal was to the eye alone.

In sound film we appeal to two senses at once, so we lose visual speed, we cannot dazzle eye and ear at once. It is simpler to fill the ear with words and music like a theatre piece and titivate the eye with a visual accompaniment in unison with the sound. But we know that there lies the path to boredom.

Here stands the challenge to the filmwright and to the audience. It is for the filmwright to avoid the conventions which beset us; to break away from the recurring influence of the theatre, to renounce the bonds of commerce and to explore the untapped possibilities of this marvellous new medium which science has lately invented for us and of which we ourselves are the pioneers.

It is just as necessary for the audience to discriminate, to seek out not merely the better in films, for that is only comparative. Audiences must also acquire and preserve absolute standards of appreciation in order to avoid the slow deterioration of values which can and does spread almost unconsciously among the craftsmen working in the close, nervous, competitive atmosphere of the commercial film studios. No sane person wants to dictate what the public should want, but it would be better if a bigger proportion of the public knew how to pick their films and why they make their choice.

I live too close to the medium to try to give absolute standards as a yardstick of critical appreciation. In the first place, I learned my trade largely in the department of film editing. To me the sound film, like the silent film, is still a matter of pieces of film which have to be laid together, and which in doing so create a work which is

more than the sum of the elements inherent in the individual strips of celluloid. But while in silent films you laid them in comparatively short lengths to form one continuous film, in sound cinema you lay a line of rather longer visual strips, and in parallel you build or mount hundreds of strips of sound in several layers in harmony with and conflict against the visuals. In a true sound film far more of this scheme of editing is pre-arranged in script form than was necessary or proper in silent film, yet there remains, in all except the bastard theatre type of films, a wide scope for imaginative experiment in the dramatic assembly or mounting of significant sound.

The art of the sound film lies in creating a performance which the articulate audience is satisfied can exist in no other medium. Firstly, the story clearly and simply carried, in the main, through visuals, beautiful or ugly as the drama demands, apt movement or action within each shot, progress through sharp rhythmic conflict from shot to shot, visuals that are more than moving pictures, visuals that convey meanings and that stir emotions by the significant selection of acting, use of background, use of light and shade, visuals in two dimensions but consciously contrived to suggest a third dimension. Secondly, the story pointed and commented on by a harmonious contrast of sound, all manner of sounds on which the filmwright rings the changes as his imagination dictates. Principally, there is dialogue to reveal character by conversation which often can be quite effectively irrelevant to the direct progress of the story. There is a place for the witty, the finely composed and for the apparently ineffective. Stupid words and a halting delivery can convey a peak of tragedy on the screen. In a sound film the way the words are spoken is as important as the words themselves.

To my mind progress in sound films, which the articulate audience should look for and encourage, lies in freeing

the medium from the humdrum, matter-of-fact, so-called straightforward use of sound. Straightbackward is an apter term to use. The current practice of using sound to give geographical perspective to the scene is theatrical and uncine-matic. We welcome the exceptions, however timid in their departure from convention. How bald and obvious *Brief Encounter* would have been, told objectively; how grateful one is for its selective style, subjective to the experience of one character. How intolerable is the American practice of laying music through a film to drown the audience's restlessness at dull moments which only the bare demands of the plot can justify! But music as part of the drama, as commentator and interpreter to point the emotional colour of the scene while restraint elsewhere is called for, such use of music is a proper element in the scheme of a film.

In remembering the horse of form, we must not forget the cart of content. The artist has to have something to film before he can experiment with the way to film it. I have said that many of the films which are critically admired are failures financially. New and better films must be about new and better ideas as well as being better expressions of the old ideas. Toscanini and all the resources of the Scala at Milan could not turn *The Desert Song* into grand opera. And what is more important, they would feel insulted if one asked them to.

The film of personalities, the gossip film, is the standard film of to-day. The sound film of ideas, equivalent to Eisenstein's "intellectual cinema" of the silent period, is a new field for experiment which we have scarcely glimpsed as yet, except in the case of a few mildly dramatic documentaries. And those were exciting enough. No filmwright will dare to venture into that field unless the audience dares him to be daring. It has become a joint responsibility.

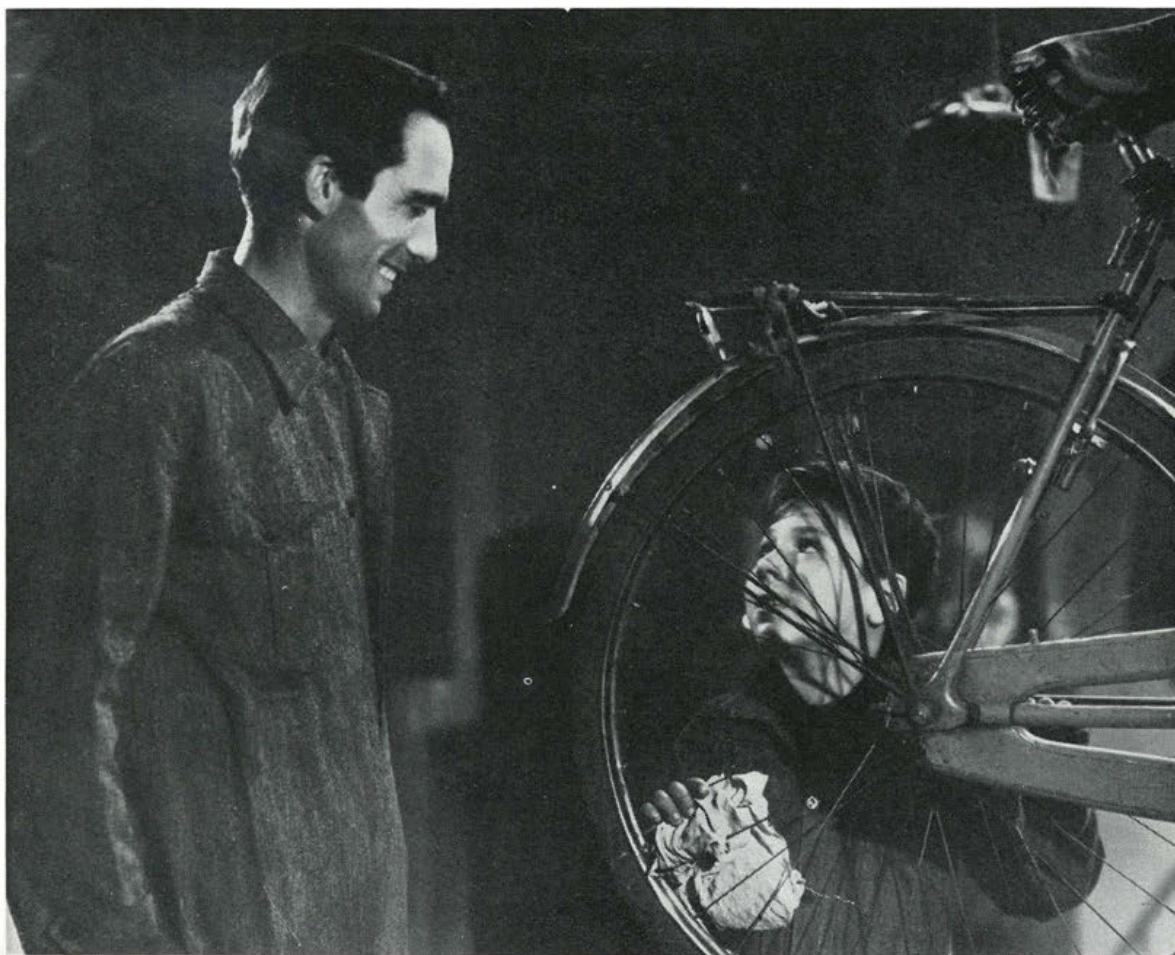


Carné's latest film, "*La Marie du Port*," with Jean Gabin, from a story by Simenon: a return to realism.

# Films of the Month

## BICYCLE THIEVES

Richard Winnington



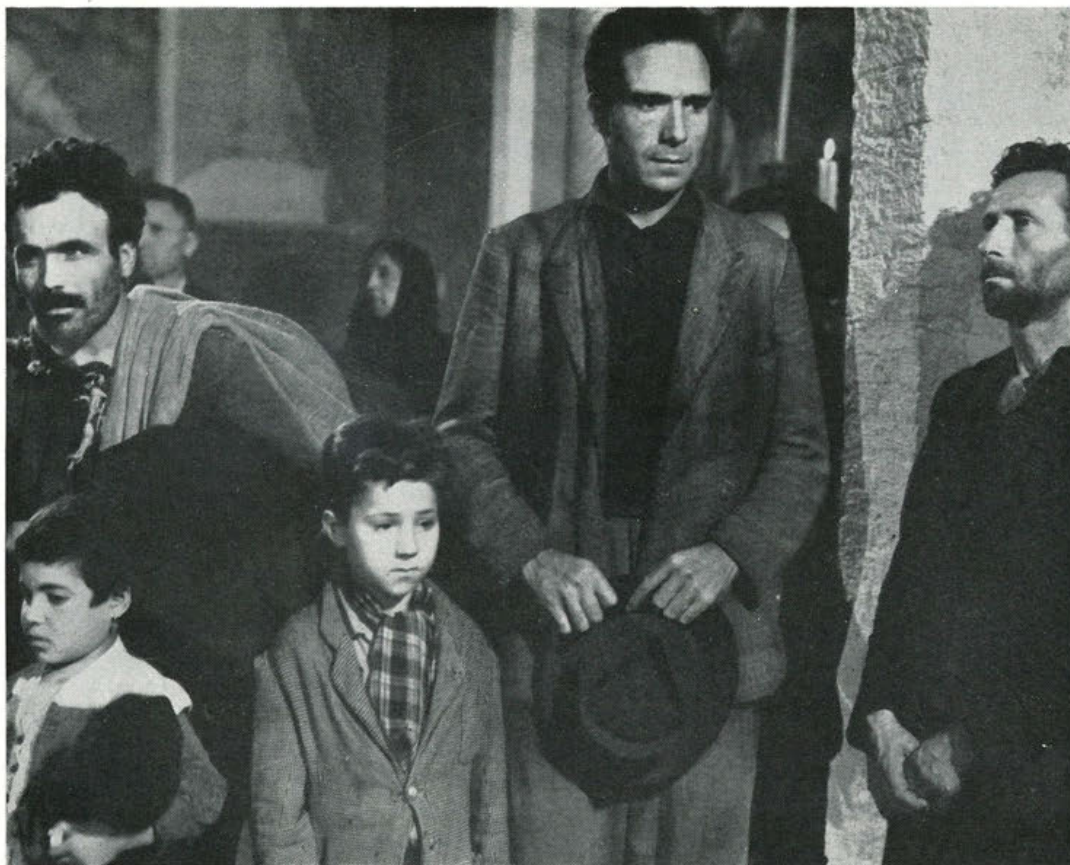
"*Bicycle Thieves*." Lamberto Maggiorani and Enzo Staiola.

DE SICA'S *Bicycle Thieves*, like Rossellini's *Paisa*, came to London with a fabulous reputation to live up to, and, in a way, to live down. To *Paisa*, a film made in a state of almost feverish immediacy, the two-year gap between continental and London showings was costly. The crudities inseparable from Rossellini's hotfoot production methods took on larger proportions, the film's courageous humanity had lost perhaps some of its heat in retrospect. In any case, the London critics found cause to lower the film's status. Public audiences had fewer quibbles.

The word "great" was affixed to de Sica's film by Clair, Becker, Lean, Cavalcanti, Ustinov and numbers of travellers from Italy as long as a year ago, when a percipient British exhibitor could have bought it for a quarter of the price (£5,000) eventually paid. Confronted with a reputed masterpiece that turned out to be a masterpiece, the British Press came fairly clean. There were little murmured warnings about "slightness", and a ludicrous belittlement

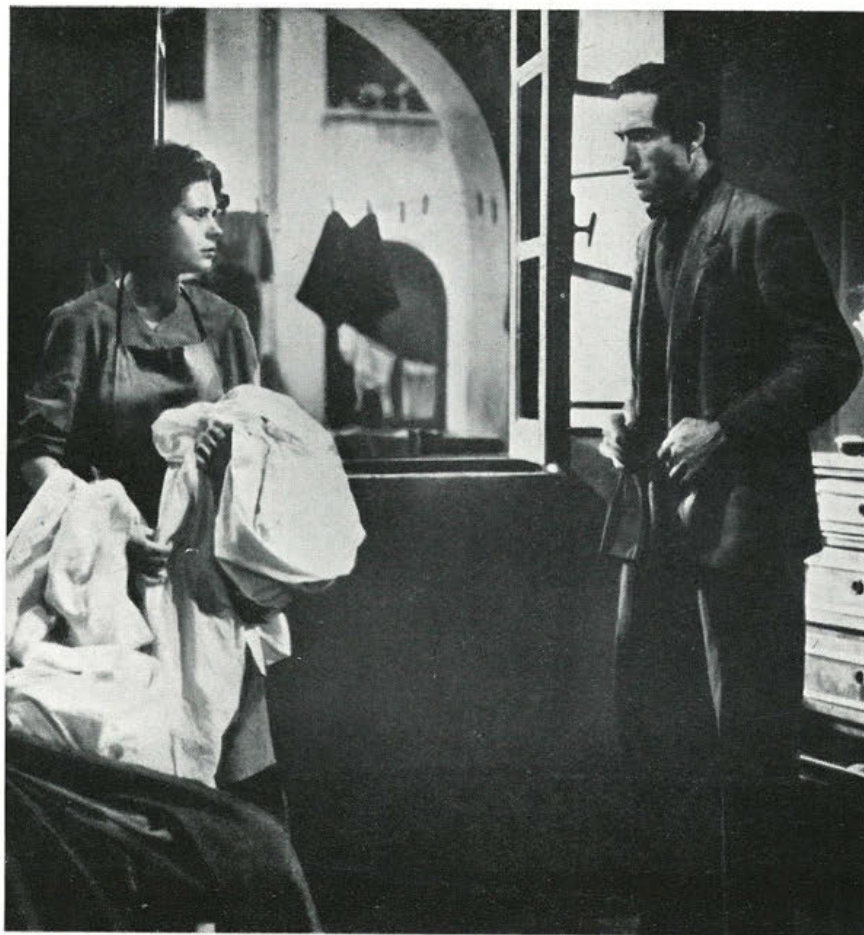
from a prominent critic who smelled communism—the self-same critic, it will be remembered, who gave Vigo's *Zéro de Conduite* "zero for achievement and one for trying". But the reviews, guarded or otherwise, were sufficient to start *Bicycle Thieves* on what may well be the most successful record of any foreign film in British cinemas.

*Bicycle Thieves* is a wholly satisfying film in that de Sica has so simplified and mastered the mechanics of the job that nothing stands between you and his intention. It can be likened to a painting that is formed in an intensity of concentration, and is as good as finished before it reaches the canvas. In fact, *Bicycle Thieves*, as a film properly should, relates to plastic and in no sense to dramatic or literary art. de Sica displays this with the opening compilation of visuals, which at once places his family in an environment of slow, sapping industrial poverty, where the bicycle and the bed linen represent the last claims of domestic pride, and where the pawnshop and the tenement fortune-



## Bicycle Thieves

*Above: father and son arrive at the church. Right: the workman's wife will pawn their marriage linen so he may honour his bicycle.*



teller batten on misery. It is, needless to say, a Rome the visitor sees though seldom penetrates, but where, before the war, he might have admired the triumphs of Mussolini's industrial architecture.

At the same time and with the same economy, de Sica draws his family portrait group. An unemployed artisan with baffled dreams of security, a young wife with fading looks and breaking temper, a small boy full of premature knowledge who mingles criticism of his father with worship, and clownish innocence with precocious responsibility. de Sica may have been lucky with this amazing child (Enzo Staiola), with the father and with nearly all the rest of his unprofessional cast, but he spent a long time and used a rare instinct in finding them.

For all that, by some process of magnetism, de Sica has drawn from this boy an unparalleled child performance, it is the man who is his symbol of the human plight. He is the helpless individual, herded with, yet isolated from his fellows, who is caught in a situation. To de Sica and many Italians who have absorbed their Kafka and Sartre, this is the general theme of the century. It might be said to parallel the situation of Italy herself.

The story of that heartrending Sunday search after the stolen bicycle is now too familiar to bear retelling. Its simplicity, far from being evidence of slightness, is the outcome of a discipline that has rigorously set itself against any facile effects of "poetry", but has evolved a complex pattern of mood and incident. The ironies, humours, oddities and heartbreaks of this adventure in the modern jungle connect with the experience of any town-dweller who has been isolated at some time or times by misfortune, great or small, and finds his familiar world suddenly hostile and strange.

*Bicycle Thieves* is the true genre movie, and a superlative exercise in screen realism. Starting with his conception of

the man and the boy, de Sica spent a year preparing the film. When it came to shooting, he found he had no need to refer to the script; the whole thing was clear in his mind. The fluid crowd scenes, so beautifully composed and natural, were obtained by roping off the streets with the help of the police, and enlisting the passers-by. The casual effects were all calculated.

de Sica's lifetime of experience in the theatre and cinema as a leading man and comedian (which led him to abjure the professional actor) may account for his power to compel those flawless performances from his amateurs. But it is a painter's instinct, probably inherited from his mother, which enriches his films with such comprehensive detail. His detached compassion, his sense of irony, his tolerant understanding, are the fruits of long study of his fellow men in difficult times. Anger does not show in his films, and anger is a concomitant of hope. Yet I do not find the conclusion of *Bicycle Thieves* wholly pessimistic. Comradeship did to some extent sustain this man and doubtless, one feels, will do so again.

With *Bicycle Thieves*, de Sica considers he has sufficiently exploited "realism" for the moment. An artist who has found his true medium somewhat late in life, he possesses an unpredictable capacity for development. And in Cesaer Zavattini he has found the scriptwriter who can play Prévert to his Carné. Their next film (the third of the trilogy which *Shoeshine* started), will essay a new form—"irrealism". de Sica claims that in this film, *The Poor Disturb*, he will make "the unreal seem real, the improbable seem probable, and the impossible seem possible" without the use of camera tricks. This could mean plain fantasy or, preferably, an experimental attempt to go beyond literal vision in the way Jean Vigo did. But the structure will be realistic, the actors non-professional, and their milieu the slums of Milan. de Sica believes in poor people.

## A Note by de Sica

TO SEE IS VERY USEFUL to an artist. Most men do not want to see, because often the pain of others troubles them. We, on the contrary, want to see. Our one aim is to see.

How many times the workman Antonio passed close to me: I met him in the street, at church, at the door of the cinema while he read the programme outside. I saw him several times with his son. In Italy men often go out with their sons. Children converse and argue with their fathers, become confidants, and very often become no longer children, but "little men".

This, I think, is universal, and that is why the image of these two beings, which I always saw united, made me decide to choose the story of Antonio and Bruno.

Lamberto Maggiorani, a simple workman of Breda, was very kind to me. He left his own work for two months to lend his face to me. I never had any difficulty with

him . . . He lived with great truth and naturalness the part of Antonio, from whom was stolen the tool he needed for living—his bicycle. It was not hard for me to direct Maggiorani.

Enzo Staiola is the most lovable child in the world. He is good, sensitive, intelligent. I don't think it is possible to create a character like that of Bruno without having the qualities which Enzo possesses.

He is a poor child, son of refugees whom I met by accident. His open, communicative face appealed to me at once. His expressions are half comic. His eyes have a soft and melancholy look. With his large nose and chubby cheeks he has the unmistakable look of a child who has known suffering.

I do not think I have to explain why I had no difficulty whatever in directing this child, who my good fortune enabled me to meet by chance in the street.

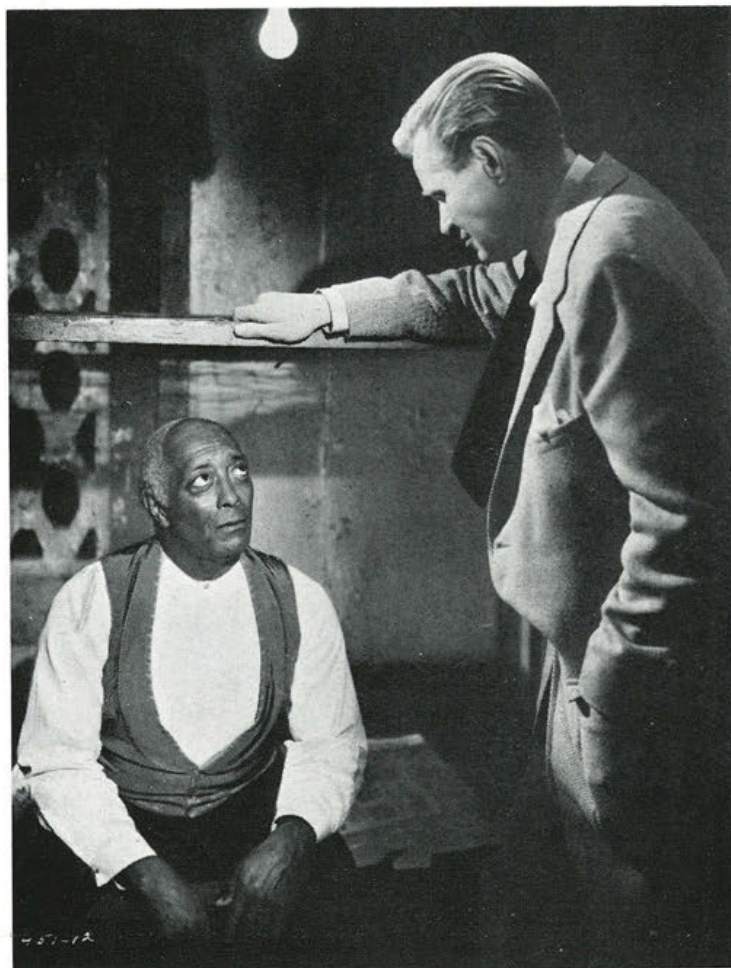
# HERE TODAY . . .

**INTRUDER IN THE DUST** (M.G.M., American). Of the film adapted from his own novel, William Faulkner is reputed to have said: "one of the finest pictures I've ever seen". I don't know what films Mr. Faulkner has been seeing lately, or what he has missed in the last twenty years, but his estimate seems a trifle high. It would, anyway, be a pity to overpraise *Intruder In The Dust*, which has little to fear from a sober consideration—since it is, in many ways, the most impressive film on the negro question that Hollywood has sent us. It does not reach the level of, say, *The Ox-Bow Incident* (which dealt with an actual lynching), through a certain lack of breadth in handling; the film is gripping rather than moving, it has more intelligence than passion. But it has also a grasp of character rare in American filmmaking, particularly of this kind. "Problem" pictures are apt to flatten characterisation for the sake of situation: witness *Pinky*, with its beautifully acted but two-dimensional supporting gallery of types, or the small-town family of *Lost Boundaries*, drawn from script-conference mythology.

*Intruder In The Dust* is the story of Lucas Beauchamp, an elderly American negro in a Southern community accused of shooting a white man in the back. He is locked in the town jail (already full of negroes): lynching fever simmers just below the surface of the town, in the disagreeably silent crowd standing around the square; an attack on the jail, led by the murdered man's vicious brother, seems imminent. Through the agencies of four people—a sixteen-year-old boy, Chick, who half-likes, half-dislikes, is afraid of and intrigued by Lucas: his uncle, a lawyer, who unwillingly consents to take up the case: an indomitable spinster of seventy, an old friend of Lucas' dead wife: and the town's level-headed sheriff—the negro's innocence is finally established and the real murderer apprehended. Through their experience, Chick and his uncle come to realise their own prejudices and the demands of their consciences.

The film is given depth and fascination principally by its presentation of Lucas the negro, not a wholly sympathetic character. Dignified and gentle, he can also be maddeningly self-righteous; he has a sly pride. At first he seems unwilling to help himself, ungrateful for the assistance of others. At the end, Chick's uncle remarks that he is still "insufferable". But he is also their conscience: "Lucas wasn't in trouble. *We* were in trouble . . ."

Ben Maddow's script follows the novel with remarkable fidelity, reproducing much of the original dialogue and satisfactorily compressing the narrative structure. He leaves out one of Faulkner's recurring points—that the South must settle the negro problem for itself, that "reasonable" Northerners end only by inflaming the trouble. He also inserts two or three jarring lines of dialogue in the closing scene: the lawyer, after condemning the crowd as it disconsolately breaks up (it was waiting only for a word, a leader, to start the lynching) suddenly remarks to Chick: "It will be all right. As long as some of us are willing to fight—even one of us . . ." After the



Lucas (Juano Hernandez) and the lawyer (David Brian)

mindlessness and sensation-hunger exposed, this is a faint-hearted and superfluous evasion.

Faulkner's novel combines, oddly and not altogether successfully, the tension of a detective story-type plot—Lucas' mysterious refusal to give the evidence that might save him, the nocturnal expedition to dig up the grave, the tracking of the real murderer—and a mannered, discursive literary style. (There are involved and twisted sentences, at least two of them more than a page long.) Clarence Brown's direction is also mannered: deliberate, a little stiff, occasionally florid in the choice of angles, but his style does not obscure characterisation. The leading players, Claude Jarman, David Brian, Elizabeth Patterson and particularly Juano Hernandez as Lucas, give strong and clear-cut performances. The photography is sharp, unpretentious, and the soundtrack uses much effective natural detail (there is no background music, apart from the credits and a swell-up for the fade-out). Finally, *Intruder In The Dust* is a faithful and dramatic film that, unlike *Pinky*, gains in retrospect.



Contrasts: above, father and son in "Bicycle Thieves"; below, batman and boy in "The Rocking Horse Winner." "Mr. Mills, splendid actor, fails to get through to us."



# ACTING

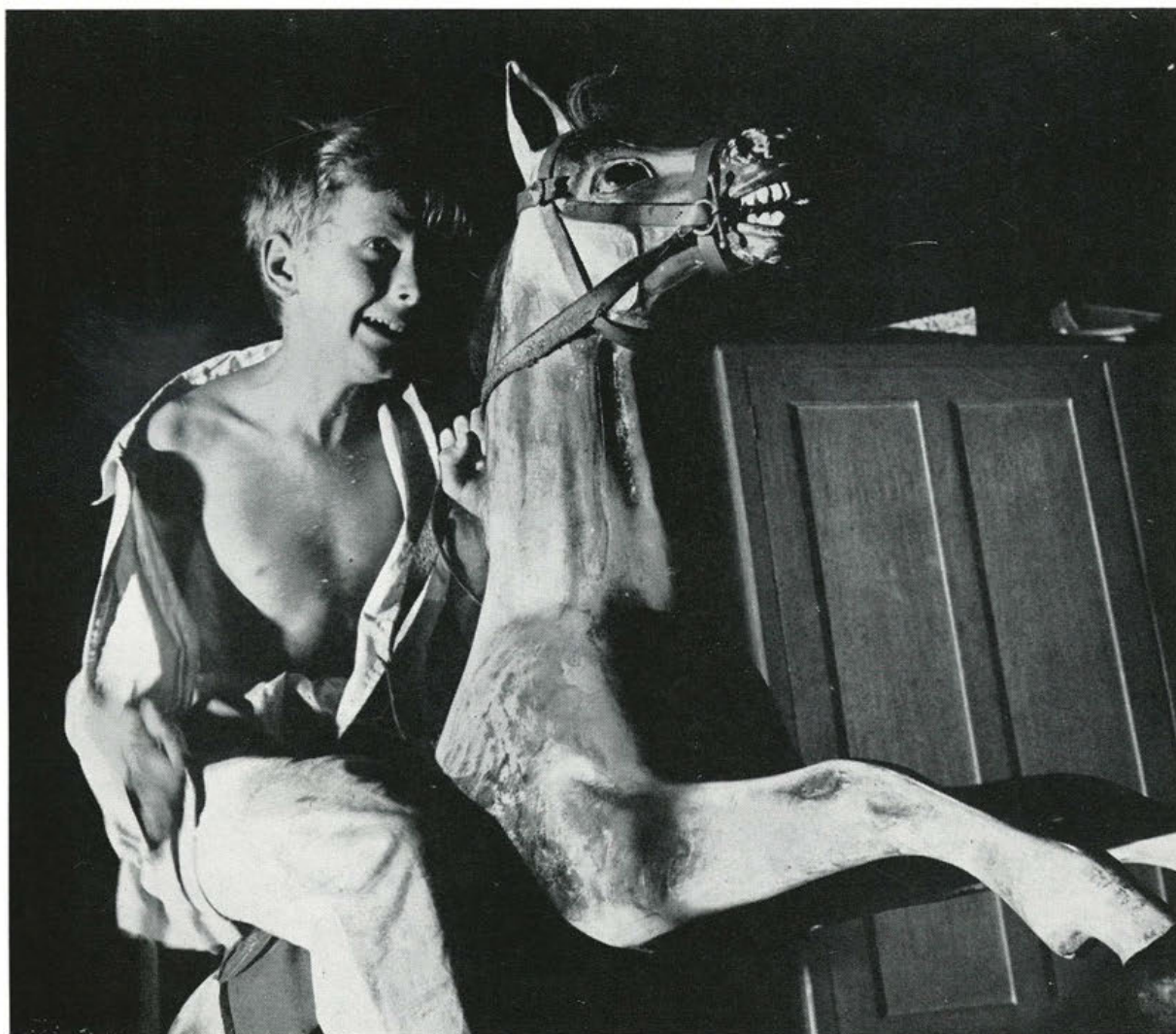
Philip Hope-Wallace

RECENTLY, in SIGHT AND SOUND I wrote of the confusion which exists in many minds—critical and uncritical—as to what film acting amounts to. Two films which have now appeared might have been (though I do not flatter myself they were) made to illumine the point I was trying to make. One is called *Ladri di Biciclette* (*Bicycle Thieves*) by De Sica—about a man and boy looking for a stolen machine, realised in Rome, in all weathers. The other, *The Rocking Horse Winner*, by Anthony Péliissier, about a little boy—the tale is by D. H. Lawrence—whose gift of psychic prognosis helped his horse-gambling ma out of a hole but overdid his little strength. It is set—where? One hardly knows; some vague half-world of Maidenhead or Golders Green, a shifting impalpable background where no bird ever sang. The Italian film is a footsore hour padding round Rome; you can smell the dust and petrol; the English film is like a teeter round the Ideal Home Exhibition, especially that garden with the paper tulips and the wrought iron gate.

But it is the difference in the playing which is of primary interest here. The Italians, I think it will be agreed, have some natural advantages; a natural "expressivo", what is known as "overdoing it", in other words indicating what your feelings are quite clearly—love, hate, greed, etc. Watch an Italian making love or eating a meal, your eyes will tell you all you want to know; or his eyes will. Italians find no difficulty in communicating with each other simply by eyework; *parlar' cogli occhi* is no fancy phrase. This, to put it mildly, helps in the realm of film making, the Kingdom of the Eye. Italians also quite naturally fall into expressive poses (forget that Italian tenor for the moment). Notice in this film how the untrained, indeed totally untried performers, even the minor characters, express themselves through their bodies (the boy suddenly tired, the disputatious crowd shoving each other). Of course, it could be "acting". When the professional Italian does it you get Duse's hands in the last act of *Ghosts*, or Anna Magnani's dying slump in *Open City* (one of the few film shots I know which could, as a composition of Pity, stand beside an Old Master's *pietà*). In this film we know it isn't acting. Just as Wyler made the armless war hero in *The Best Years Of Our Lives* seem to act, so here de Sica makes a chance workman and a precocious *bimbo* appear to act with an apparent depth and truth of feeling that—all over a tiny incident of a theft, a disappointment—floods the heart with the essence of compassion (it is the most compassionate film I recall).

Not new, of course. The Russians found out long ago that a completely still, expressionless face, cut into the screen at the right moment (as in *The Mother*) had the force of a heartrending cry on the stage. It made you wince. But then *expressivo* is not the Russians', as it is the Italians' strong suit. Nor the Englishmen's—which as all the world knows is phlegm; and wonderful effects have been got here in this way, though chiefly in the field of documentary; some steady, unwinking, canny stare.

But the word is steady. Efforts to make us English (or us Swedes or Russians) act "natural" usually end in the photographic equivalent of an embarrassing B.B.C.



John Howard Davies in "The Rocking Horse Winner." *Expressivo naturale?*

interview from *In Town Tonight*. Just occasionally someone like Pickles can do it, for a moment.

So in *Bicycle Thieves* you have an extra element; De Sica (or if you prefer) the eye of his camera does the work, makes the comment, times the effect, assures the highest visual eloquence; but in addition you have, on the part of the unschooled player, a dynamic, and totally natural contribution. Fatigue writes itself on the face of a player as naturally as it does on the slumping limbs of a puppy. "Only negroes—and children can really act; the rest just try" said someone thoroughly tiresome. And, of course, there is some truth in that, especially with Italian children. But not all children; nor all directors either, apparently. Mr. Péliissier has talent and courage. But he puts together his film, with its good idea from D. H. Lawrence's story, in a way which makes one despair. I am not one of those who considered Master John Howard Davies the infant Roscius on the strength of his performance in *Oliver Twist*, which struck me personally as lacking in talent to a marked degree, even in that indifferent film. Sweet little boy, yes; but *expressivo naturale*? No sir! There are some moments in this after all poignant new piece where he is called upon to look poignant; perhaps because of the music which surges up at these moments, I am reminded only of Mme. Kirsten Flagstad, over whose face as Isolde at crucial moments steals a look of intense Norwegian curiosity.

But it is not the boy who so disappoints as an actor here. It is the hard working professional players. I should say (and it is saying a lot) that Miss Valerie Hobson, easily England's most ladylike film star, has never put into a rôle so much cleverly calculated work; she acts "at" the camera relentlessly, artfully, with very appreciable skill, variety and patience, and yet, and yet . . . To be sure, the camera is most unresponsive; it constantly catches her unfairly, dead-pan, *yet obviously trying* at the same time; (dead pan shots must be passive shots, which never suggest that the photographed actor is trying at that moment to develop expressively what is going on within his or her mind). More curious still is the case of John Mills; here is the whole bag of tricks, plus very considerable personal charm; Mummerset accent, old-young rustic deference, even a *limp*! Again, here is positive acting, acted "at" the camera, with the camera looking about excitedly, like a woman at a linen sale, but nothing whatever emerging. Mr. Mills, splendid actor, fails to get through to us; equally our imagination is given no help in playing upon *him*.

It would be absurd to suggest that film acting can consist only of inspired editing of natural behaviour; at the same time it is worth insisting over and over again—and even of exaggerating the truth that it is the eye of the camera, alert or sluggish, which finally decides what is and what is not "a performance".

# MUSIC

Antony Hopkins

ONE OF THE MOST INTERESTING THINGS I have discovered since I began to write these articles is that you will find films mentioned on this page that are very unlikely to be singled out for any other qualities than their music. In fact, I would go so far as to say that I derive a certain malicious pleasure from discovering felicities in the scores of films which, from every other angle, have been subjected to the full weight of the critics' scorn. As a full-time musician, and only a part-time critic, I cast my net rather wider than the more exalted film columnists; and I find that though I may sometimes miss the more exotic offerings of the Academy and the Curzon, I often discover unsuspected joys on the local circuits. In fact, I am a very ordinary filmgoer (admittedly something of an addict); but a filmgoer who uses both eyes and ears to equal advantage. If, then, you are a supercilious reader bent on discovering a possible spiritual unity between a chord of the super-tonic minor ninth and a close-up of Jean Marais' bared chest (inverted), you must look elsewhere for your satisfaction; for this critic is going to mention films that would harrow your very soul—for instance, *Calamity Jane* and *Sam Bass*.

I walked into the local Odeon to see this epic during a scene in which several hard-looking characters were sitting or standing in dejected attitudes in the middle of a large Texan desert. My eye was at once attracted to Miss Yvonne de Carlo's matchless features: but my ear was even more entranced by a sweet meandering on two flutes, with a harp-studded background of shimmering heat that was utterly beguiling. Here for a brief refreshing moment was a passage of real chamber music, worthy of Roussel or de Falla. The composer of this otherwise standard Western score is somewhat improbably named Milton Shewarzwald; but then I was intrigued to find the other day that he was also responsible for the music of *The Naked City*. This potential classic had a comparable moment. Do you remember when the young detective goes off into the streets to "look for a man named Willie who plays the harmonica"? Almost unnoticed in the background, a harmonica and bass clarinet play a delicately interwoven duet which is every bit as beautiful as the ravishing bass-flute passage in Britten's *Rape of Lucretia*. The only difference is that one is enshrined for ever in print and will always be listened to with delight, while the other is already forgotten and will depend for its survival on occasional showings of the film at small repertory cinemas. It is this squandering of beauty that really worries me when it comes to any discussion of incidental music.

In the same programme as *Calamity Jane* was *East of Java*—a film in which Miss Shelley Winters was ogled to little effect by a pianist called Liberace and usually referred to as Maestro. I am unable to surmise what unmentionable impropriety this paragon of the concert-hall must have committed to cause him to endure a life-long and apparently self-imposed banishment to the Farthest East; but his technique (keyboard) was in fine shape, and apparently a piano-tuner called regularly at the café. At any rate, his presence was made the excuse for playing a series of Gems From The Classics, of most of which he seemed to have a somewhat fragmentary recollection. However, at the Americo-Eurasian Trading Company's party, he was given a real piano with three legs, and was able to play a concerto which he had last performed at Carnegie Hall. This sequence managed to combine everything I most detest about allegedly "musical" pictures: the pianist gazing into the middle distance, hearing the orchestra first in his imagination, then increasingly loud as the recording engineer brings it into focus; the fantastic abuse of the word concerto when related to a piece of music lasting about four minutes, with a first movement consisting of half-a-dozen chords and a pseudo-Lisztian cadenza; the pretentious assumption that anyone could play such a piece of trash at Carnegie Hall and get away with it; and lastly the ridiculous convention of making the pianist play a "concerto" when he knows there is not an orchestra available. I would much rather hear him say, as happened at one sublime moment in a long-forgotten film: "I will now play all the Hungarian Rhapsodies of Franz Liszt; there are fifteen of them".

The best score for a comedy that I have heard for a long time is in *Tell It To The Judge* (Werner R. Heymann).<sup>\*</sup> My usual complaint—that there was too *much* music; but that is not the composer's fault. It was, however, full of the most delightful touches, beautifully synchronised with the action, and it included a little tune for pizzicato strings that will haunt me for ages. How rarely does one have such moments—moments which one is eager to hear again at the first opportunity. I suppose I have seen the Marx Brothers going West about five times now; yet whenever I go again I always look forward to the incomparable setting of "Riding the Range Together" (harmonica, guitar, percussion and very discreet orchestra), and to Harpo's

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<sup>\*</sup> Also wrote the original score for *Congress Dances* and worked with Lubitsch on many pictures.—Editor

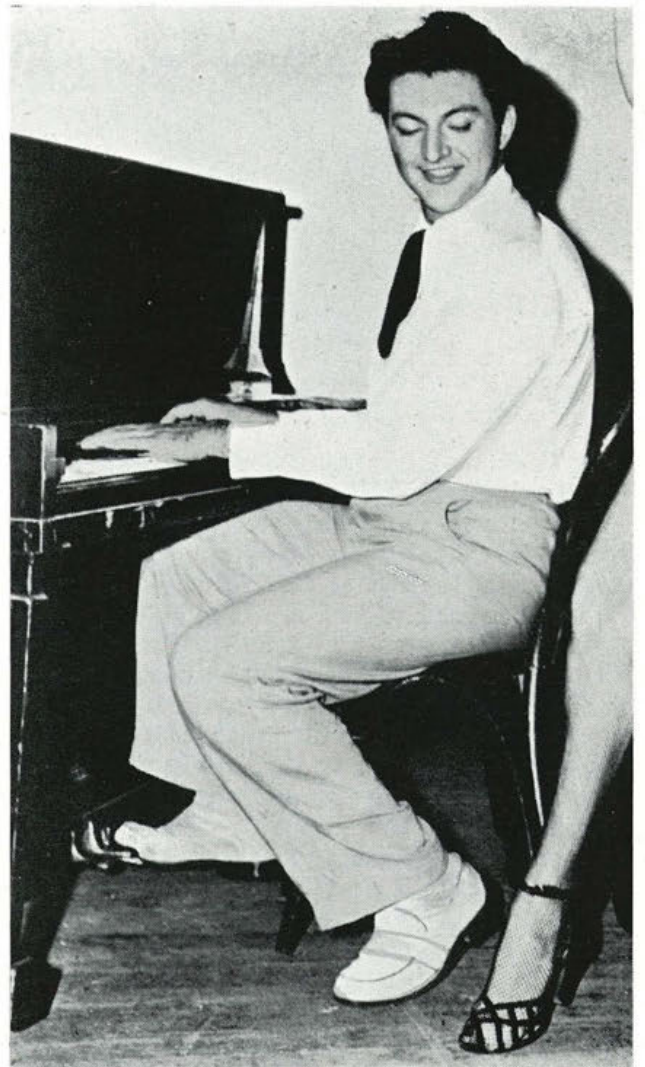
ravishing harp solo with the low flute obligato.

Two other points I should like to mention: the immense pleasure I got from the singer who dubbed for Linda Darnell in *Everybody Does It*, a musical of considerable merit in that it refrained from making the sort of howlers to be found in *East Of Java*. (I still consider *Unfaithfully Yours* the funniest film of this type I have so far seen: a comparison of it with the "conductor" episode in *Train Of Events* is most revealing. The master hand of Preston Sturges is everywhere apparent, whereas in the British film the "musical" humour is laboured and utterly unreal.)

Secondly, a magically mysterious moment in *East Of*

*the Rising Sun*—a geographical location that I am unable to correlate with Malaya by any mental convolution. There was a sequence here at night in the jungle, as the boats sailed downstream; the soundtrack was wonderfully devised, a blend of cicadas and remote music. Bronislau Kaper's music was merely a sustained tremolo with tiny dabs of sound on celeste and vibraphone, like the delicately fluttering fingers of a blind man. Yet the tension was tremendous. It is passages like this that make one have faith in the powers of incidental music. As Adolph Deutsch once said: "We composers are like undertakers—we can make the film look pretty, but we can't bring it to life".

### Splendours and Miseries of the Local Circuit



Left: Linda Darnell as Fatima in the opera sequence of "Everybody Does It." Right: Maestro Liberace, etc., in "East of Java."

# A STRANGE SUPPRESSION

Simon Harcourt-Smith



*"Letter from an Unknown Woman." Joan Fontaine.*

THE OTHER EVENING, having a mind to see a film, I looked in the local paper for what was passing through our nearby town. Grable at one cinema: at the other, surprisingly enough, you could see Joan Fontaine playing with Louis Jourdan in *Letter from an Unknown Woman*.

I had never heard of this film; nobody had mentioned to me its appearance in London. Perhaps it had not deserved mention? Perhaps it had come and gone while I was abroad? In any event, I expected from my outing no pleasure more substantial than that of watching Joan Fontaine irradiate by her acting—as we have seen her do so incomparably, and so distressingly often—uninteresting direction and inane script.

My friend the manager, at his cinema door, did not encourage me. The picture, he warned me in male complicity, was "all right for the ladies". Naturally I expected a tearful ramble up to an angelic chorus. Nor, I am bound to say, did my heart rise with titles and credits. A Hollywood vision of Vienna in 1900, from the pen of that almost too unctuous purveyor of nostalgia, the late Stefan Zweig? Here surely was a promise of embarrassment that not even Fontaine could contrive to break.

Yet the first sequence was not half run before there was

a strange happening. My early reactions to a film are generally physical. The commonest of these reactions is (alas!) a pain in the back, a sort of æsthetic lumbago, prophesying disappointment and exasperation. Less frequent, but more hopeful, is a tingling of the fingers when in an otherwise inept film, one comes on a sequence of beauty, poetry, wit, successful fantasy. Most precious of all is the film which, even if it does not lift one to supreme exaltation, conveys such a sense of unity that the body relaxes as in a friendly sea, only the eye and the ear keep alert not to miss one gesture, one word of someone that has suddenly become a trusted friend.

It is just this sense of artistic entity, to which one can give almost entire confidence, that is wanting in many a film cited among the best of last year which may have been more spectacularly brilliant than *Letter from an Unknown Woman*. Stefan Zweig's story may be romantic, both in the usual sense of the word and in its mood, the mood of the prosperous XIXth century, when revolution had apparently been halted for ever, the possibility of the world's destroying itself was reserved for scientific thrillers, and love alone could provide that melancholy which is part of every epoch's balanced diet. But the film of this



*Opuls' Vienna—a comparison. Above, Fontaine and Louis Jourdan in "Letter from an Unknown Woman." Below, Magda Schneider and Wolfgang Liebeneiner in "Liebelei."*



story, under the direction of Max Opuls (who made *Liebele*), has become profoundly "classical"—in the sense that a number of elements, none of them disproportionately obvious, add up, as it were, in a fine Palladian elevation, to a work of art. Script, cutting, direction, settings, camerawork, are all unobtrusively brilliant. In the casting and playing (to which I will later return), the captious might have reservations about Art Smith as the deaf-mute valet; the musical score may not seem by European standards to be entirely adequate for a film that turns quite as much as does this one upon music: but these are very minor blemishes beside the virtues of the picture.

The story is of a high-strung conventionality that might, in lesser hands, have turned ridiculous. A dissipated young man (Louis Jourdan) is dropped late at night by friends who will return at five next morning to take him to a duel provoked by an outraged husband. He has no intention of fighting the duel; rather, he will run for it. But he is handed a letter by his valet, from a hand that he does not recognise. The suggestion by the writer that she may be dead before he has finished reading leads to a flashback to a radiant schoolgirl (Joan Fontaine) hopelessly longing for the gallant young pianist who has come to live in the flat across the courtyard. He disturbs her adolescence by his playing and his late entries, his arms lightly burdened by erring beauties. Discouraged for the moment, she allows herself to be carried off to Linz, where her widowed mother has comfortably married again. The Linz sequence, where church bells, military music and unflagging sunlight brilliantly suggest the intolerable happiness of a garrison town, ends in a proposal of marriage from a "suitable" if pompous lieutenant of cavalry. The girl, suddenly realising that the touch of any man but her heedless pianist would be unimaginable, refuses the offer, runs off to Vienna, and sets her course for tragedy and death.

She finds work as a mannequin, spends her leisure waiting in the street before the pianist's house, contrives eventually to be picked up by him. He takes her off to dinner, then to the Prater. Here, perhaps, Max Opuls' direction achieves its climax of virtuosity. Hollywood has always delighted to chronicle the first amorous excursion, the impulsive purchase from the old flower-seller, the eye now cynically parched, now damp with sentiment of the understanding waiter, the restive orchestra as the lovers dance on in the deserted restaurant. In the amusement park, love decks with poetry even the shabby and the garish. All these clichés occur in *Letter from an Unknown Woman*, so that for a moment one might fancy oneself witnessing the revival of some richly scented classic . . . But confusion is soon dispelled, the cliché turns surprisingly inside out, to reveal a patter brighter, more fanciful than the usual side had ever possessed. It is the audacity of a craftsman completely confident, and with so strong a sense of style that he can compose an entirely original thought out of platitudes. On a modest scale, one is reminded of Bach building his great "Ricercare" on a tuppenny theme of Frederick the Great's, or of Pope drawing new life from decrepit epithets which, when returned to Grub Street, lie down and die.

The platitude, however, in the hands of Opuls and Joan Fontaine can create the moment of poetry, which in the peculiar manner of film poetry flies into the memory, and there digs itself in to haunt you. I think of the hotel bedroom in *Quai des brumes*, Arletty's arrival at the castle in

*Les visiteurs du soir*, the umbrellas mourning before Pushkin's house in *Lermontov*. To these we can now fairly add the moment from *Letter from an Unknown Woman* in the deserted restaurant, when the pianist sits down at a piano and begins to play. Lisa, the girl, not *Vénus toute entière* but at once Venus' acolyte and the adoring prey, comes to kneel beside the keyboard. She turns her face to gaze up at his hands, his head; in a flash the incident, begun trivially enough, assumes a significance far beyond his comprehension. It is rare enough for even the merest hint of love to reach us from the screen; this scene annihilates the whole repertory of mimed emotions, from prudery to sensuousness, which do duty for love on the Anglo-Saxon cinema.

Inevitably Lisa accepts her seduction as the crowning joy of her young life. As inevitably, the pianist leaves her next day for a concert appearance in Milan; he protests he will only be gone a fortnight, but never makes another effort to find her. She bears his child, and after tribulation finds security in marriage to a distinguished official. One fatal evening her husband takes her to the opera, and there she catches sight of her pianist. He has seen her too, yet it is not her whom he sees, not the adoring girl whose life he has been, but only a strange unrecognised pretty woman that arouses in him all the well-trained instincts of the chase.

He accosts her—still for her the fascinating obsession of her life, though now no more than a dissipated failure. His decline, alas! in no way curbs her passion; rather does it bring on an ally in the shape of her maternal instinct. Heedless of her husband's warning, she goes off next day to the pianist's apartment, only to find herself entirely unrecognised, and he turning upon her all that battery of charm which is commonly supposed to excuse so much that is depressing in Danubian civilisation.

Not having read Stefan Zweig's original story, I cannot tell whether the heroine's fortuitous death from typhus appears in it or no. On the screen, it is not entirely satisfactory, though it enables the director to create an emotional atmosphere perfectly appropriate to the film's period. And the curious "montage" flashbacks which Opuls uses when the pianist after all is being carried off to his duel, far from disconcerting, tend to identify one personally with this drama of futility.

I have endeavoured already to give some idea of Joan Fontaine's remarkable performance. There are few things more difficult in acting than the satisfactory drawing of an emotional straight line—where the dominant passion which the player must trace neither hesitates nor swerves from its course for an instant. Hence the preoccupation of the average scriptwriter with "conflict". "Conflict" is in short a convenient device for concealing a poverty of emotional range; and I can think of few actresses either in America or England to-day who could have emerged triumphantly from such an ordeal as the part of Lisa Braun must have put upon Fontaine. Louis Jourdan admirably seconds her. His transition from the charming young philanderer to the worn-out gramophone record of seduction is most subtly sketched.

Such then is the film which enchanted me that recent evening in our local market-town. I came to London next day, still imagining that it had been seen months before in the West End. It was only by chance that I learned it

(Continued on page 39)

# THE FIRST YEARS

Catharine Duncan

*Joris Ivens, who has directed such notable documentaries as New Earth, The 400,000,000 and Spanish Earth, began shortly after the war to make a film about life and tradition in three European countries. He has now completed the film, and the story behind the making of it is told by Catharine Duncan, who worked with the unit and wrote the commentary.*



*"The First Years." The Bulgarian sequence: peasants listening for water.*

UNDER THE TITLE OF *The First Years* the new film of Joris Ivens has recently had its first showing in Paris. Made simultaneously in four languages, covering the people and their life in three different countries, the film was a difficult and ambitious project. Until he came to make the film, all three countries were practically unknown to Ivens and his group. They were countries with very different histories, different economic developments, and their people had widely differing temperaments. All these had to be discovered and understood before the film could begin.

To tell the story of how the film was made is a tale of adventure in itself. *The First Years* is no superficial account of the appearance of things. In each of the three countries Ivens and Marien Michelle, the scenarist, passed many months making research into human and economic problems, travelling to see for themselves, talking to the people they met, seeking out the artists and the writers—all this before they selected their own story and prepared the scenario. Afterwards, they lived with the people about whom the film was made, continually revising the script as points became clearer, problems altered, or the people

themselves made suggestions. As a result, the film emerges as a warm and intimate picture of these people and, at the same time, has a breadth and scope which embraces the whole life and spirit of their countries.

Wherever he worked, Ivens engaged his technical crew, an arrangement which had its hazards as well as its language problems. Directing a shot, he often found himself speaking a mixture of French, German, English, phrases of Polish, Bulgarian or Czech and, when necessary, swearing in Dutch. But in spite of these difficulties and the time required to establish a working unity and understanding with each new group, he felt his decision had been justified. Not only did he discover some gifted young cameramen with a great contribution to make in feeling and knowledge of their countries, but they found the experience of working with Ivens of great value, particularly in such a country as Bulgaria where the film industry has only recently been established.

For the purpose of distinguishing the difference in style and content of the three sequences, Bulgaria might be described as lyric, Czechoslovakia as practic, and Poland



*Joris Ivens, right, with his unit during the making of the film.*

as epic. They are styles which have grown out of the content, out of the very temperaments of the people themselves, and provide one of the most complete examples of the scope of documentary.

The genius of Joris Ivens lies in the fact that his camera is not an observer, but a participant in the action. Workers in other countries who saw his film *New Earth* said afterwards: "You could *feel* the weight of the pipes. You knew where the work pulls at our muscles". And Ivens himself has recounted how, when making *The Bridge*, a mechanic remarked on one occasion: "When you get up there with your camera it looks as if you're going to *eat* the bridge".

Joris Ivens does, in fact, "eat" whatever he sets out to film. For him it is always the bread and the wine, the peaceful communion between peoples of whatever tongue, whatever nationality, who understand each other by the "weight" of their common work, their struggles, and the splendour of their hopes.

Each of the three sequences has this in common, though in each case the interpretation is so different. The bread of Bulgaria might justly describe the theme of the first sequence. It is set in the little tobacco village of Radilova, part of a region in Bulgaria where tobacco provides the daily bread for over sixty thousand farmers and their families. Tobacco is also Bulgaria's most important export item, and buys the iron and steel, the machinery and other products needed to aliment the heavy industries almost wholly undeveloped before 1945.

Bulgarians have a poetry which is as natural to them as living—in their language, in their work, their clothes, in the dignity of even the humblest dwelling. It would have been easy to make these peasants the romanticised figures which have so often filled the screen of both documentary and fiction films. But Ivens has known how to find the reality which lay underneath. If their work has a certain poetic charm for the onlooker, for them it is just hard work, and the sooner they find ways and means of easing that labour the better. This effort to help the farmer is the story of the sequence, an effort which involves the whole

country. A struggle against drought, a struggle against prejudice, a struggle to provide the new machines—these are the conflicts of the drama. But though these conflicts are on such a large scale, we see them, so to speak, in close-up, among the families of Radilova. The camera has the rhythm of the village. It moves quietly over the rolling landscapes, follows the pickers between the rows of tobacco plants, travels with the ox-cart back to the village. It climbs the hills with the two boys on their adventure, and comes to rest in the shadowy rooms of the houses. It dances and takes time off in the café, or feels the pulse of the new life beating in the Mairie. For the first time in their history, these Bulgarians speak from the screen and sing their ancient folk songs. Seeing a camera and a microphone for the first time, they showed no self-consciousness, nor considered that there was anything strange or meretricious about making films.

They respected the unit as workers with their own job to do. This job might cause the farmers inconvenience in the busy season, but since all work was important, they were prepared to help. Ivens says that no people he has ever worked with were so indifferent to the presence of the camera as the Bulgarians.

In form, the Czechoslovakian sequence is a classic documentary. General in its approach, it sets out to show the high points in the history of this cross-roads of Europe—an historical survey which is necessary to the understanding of what is taking place in that country at the present time.

Like the people themselves, it is practical and down to earth; no poetry or heroics here. The Czechs are business men and the sum has to add up to the right figure at the end of the day's work. But if this is one of the most difficult, it is also one of the most interesting of the sequences, and raised many of the thornier problems of documentary. How, for example, could one show what took place in the days of Jan Hus? Reconstruction or documents, landscapes, buildings? Should one use old film material to revive the twenty years of the First Republic? What were the essential things to show in the space allotted to contemporary history? The resolution of these and innumerable other problems are of great technical interest.

The early historical sequence was eventually treated mainly through drawings and documents of the period. This use of static painting as dramatic film material has already been explored with great success recently in the films *Rubens* and *Van Gogh*, but I believe Ivens is the first to film the two-dimensional gothic style of the Middle Ages.

The Polish sequence is a different story, and I choose the word expressly. For it is a story in which Ivens has attempted to bridge the gap between fiction and documentary films. There have already been a number of documentaries which used a simple story form, but few of them have tried to show the psychological impact of environment on a human being. In the case of fiction films, the city, the mine, the countryside are frequently no more

than a background projection which plays little real part in the lives of the characters. Often, in documentary, it is the industry, the craft, or agriculture, which become a dehumanised hero. But in the Polish sequence a woman and her environment share the leading roles, and it is essentially the conflict between the two which makes the strength and drama of the film.

Ivens has opened up his frame and turned the screen into a canvas of broad dimensions. From the monstrous ruins of Warsaw, he takes us to the steel mills in Poland's regained territories which will rebuild the city, a setting which has an endless fascination for the camera. But for Ivens' camera it is more than a spectacle. It is the living steel as shovelled, as fired, and forged by these workers. The camera has found the meaning of that steel in the passion of these workers to build a life out of the ruins. Terrifying and tender, realistic and visionary, the Polish sequence provides a memorable climax to the film.

In technique, the formalists will discover plenty of material for discussion, but they will wreck themselves on the reef of the argument should they try to consider the style as separate from the content. With Joris Ivens style is always governed by content. It is the visual revelation of the content, an explanation of mood and meaning which scarcely requires commentary to underline it. This was at once the greatest gift and the greatest problem for me as commentary writer. In the Polish sequence particularly, where Ivens has let the actors and images often speak for themselves, it was a constant challenge to find the right balance between image and sound track. Often the image required no further explanation than sound effects or music by the Czech composer, Kapr. Where commentary was necessary, it had to come unobtrusively out of natural dialogue or lead into it. In the other sequences also, commentary could never add anything to the description of the image, and we always sought a counterpoint between sound and image, where commentary no longer followed an independent and parallel line, but deepened the meaning of the shot, and became, by its own contribution, so much part of the shot that it was difficult to think of one without the other.

*The First Years* is a record. The rapid changes taking place in the three countries have already made it in some



"The First Years." Polish sequence.

respects an historical record. But though it shows only the incomplete and far from utopian beginnings, it is the record of a great social change which, even if it does not always command approval, cannot be ignored. And documentary, emerging at last from the stock-taking period of the post-war years and entering into the active service of peace and construction, will find this latest film of Joris Ivens a challenge and, perhaps, a point of departure for the most profitable discussion.

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(A Strange Suppression—continued from page 36)

had never been let in there—though a less distinguished picture by Opuls, *The Reckless Moment*, was even then showing at the Odeon, Leicester Square. The nearest it has got so far to the centre of London, apparently, is the Berkeley, Tottenham Court Road.

The details of its suppression are still obscure; but this at least can be said. It was made, more than a year ago, independently under the auspices of Joan Fontaine and her husband, William Dozier, for Universal-International, the Anglo-American group with which the Rank Organisation is closely associated. When U.-I., a few months ago, began to feel the effects of the present depression, they resolved to unload some of the pictures they had received

from America for distribution. Whether nobody bothered to look at this picture, or whether the maturity of its attitude proved disconcerting, *Letter from an Unknown Woman* was passed on to a smaller distribution organisation, that either does not bother about West End runs or could not arrange one in this case. Whatever the actual truth may be, the outcome is exasperating. Once again the discriminating filmgoers of London and outside (for the film has had no regular circuit release), are deprived of an opportunity to see an American film of outstanding quality. Here is perhaps yet one more proof that too many people in control of the film industry possess little or no idea of what differentiates a good film from a bad one.

# BOOK REVIEWS

THE FILM TILL NOW by Paul Rotha, in collaboration with Richard Griffith (Vision 42/-)

THE SERIOUS CINEMA never took itself more seriously than in the late twenties. The French avant-garde, the thunderous impact of Eisenstein and Pudovkin, the sombre brilliance of U.F.A., had all encouraged cineasts. Then sound, chaining the camera to the floor, and inundating the screen with stage mannerisms, seemed to threaten the principles of their art. Out of this serious, aesthetic, enthusiastic, and yet defensive mentality, Paul Rotha produced "The Film Till Now". It is both an invaluable record, and the summing up of a contemporary critical mentality. It is an epitaph of the silent cinema which refused to recognize itself as such: sound, said Rotha, was for showmen, artists would stand by silence.

In this new edition, the old verdicts and prophecies have been allowed to stand. Sound has not proved the bogey Mr. Rotha conjured up and, far from being swept aside, the basic principles of film making have altered so little that Rotha's generalisations have passed into the clichés of film appreciation. There must have been great temptation to re-assess, but Rotha has resisted it, adding occasional mental revisions only in footnotes. As a result, his book retains the quality of immediacy summed up in the title; live comment, rather than dead record. If the generalisations have become clichés, they remain true, and the reviews of individual directors' work are serious and often perceptive.

Mr. Rotha belonged to that critical school which sees films as an end in themselves, and style as ultimately more important than content. The single-minded, ideological approach of the Russians, for instance, alarmed him a little, and he is at his best with the gloomy technicalities of Germany, and the lighter vagaries of Hollywood. But his own career since 1929 supports Richard Griffith's belief that for the last twenty years "serving a purpose beyond just film making has been the main intellectual approach to the cinema". Mr. Griffith, until recently Executive Director of the Nation Board of Motion Picture Review in New York, has this approach always in mind, and in asking him to continue "The Film Since Then", Rotha perhaps claims the need for a new critical style, which never loses sight of a film's content in chasing the occasionally elusive "cinematic values". Griffith, a controversial writer with rather more than the usual number of critical blind spots, is an analyst of trends, rather than a critic of individual films. His theories arouse great interest, admiration and, occasionally, annoyance.

Mr. Griffith is interested in the cinema as a mass medium

(a piece of jargon which English critics use with reluctance), and studies films in relation to audiences, not as an art form existing in a vacuum. Griffith on America is lively, definite and unconventional. Hollywood expresses, far more accurately than its denigrators allow, the American state of mind, and he traces the record of Depression, New Deal, retreat from isolationism, and the acute post-war social conscience as reflected in its styles and cycles. As applied to America this method is just: as applied to England, it is just and damning. Concisely and logically, Griffith demolishes the negative cosmopolitanism, purposeless escapism, and fundamental dishonesty which mark the British cinema at its best as well as its worst. This chapter also shows up the flaws in the Griffith viewpoint; his over-praise of the mediocre *The Stars Look Down* indicates the danger of seeing a social conscience as the first quality of a good film. This attitude leads to an unsympathetic dismissal (for theatricality, of all things) of the pre-war French cinema. His under-estimations, particularly of Carné's work, seem slightly shocking to the English critic. These films, whether or not they reflected the defeatism and inertia which brought about the collapse of France ten years ago, have an emotional truth and technical mastery which only the blindest critic could ignore. Mr. Griffith is at once very fallible, and very stimulating.

Mr. Rotha brings his own views up to date with a long, and characteristically controversial preface which, with its comments on the all pervading British crisis, echoes the doom-shadowed state of mind of the British critic. It is a long way from the academic principles of 1929 to the gloomy treatment of the cinema as an economic weapon. But the unhappy timeliness of the preface once more emphasises the book's title. Comprehensiveness can be deadening, and both writers are insistent on here and now.

With glossary, monumental index, lists of credits (America claiming nearly as many as all the other countries put together), and stills, including a respectable number of very good ones, this massive and inordinately bulky book is invaluable for reference. But with all the trappings of a definitive work, it remains commentary rather than history. Its historical value derives less from what is said, than from the two writers' different and complementary styles—perhaps, and it is rather an alarming thought for the future, the old and the new criticism. Even in 1950 films must sometimes be an end in themselves.

PENELOPE HOUSTON.

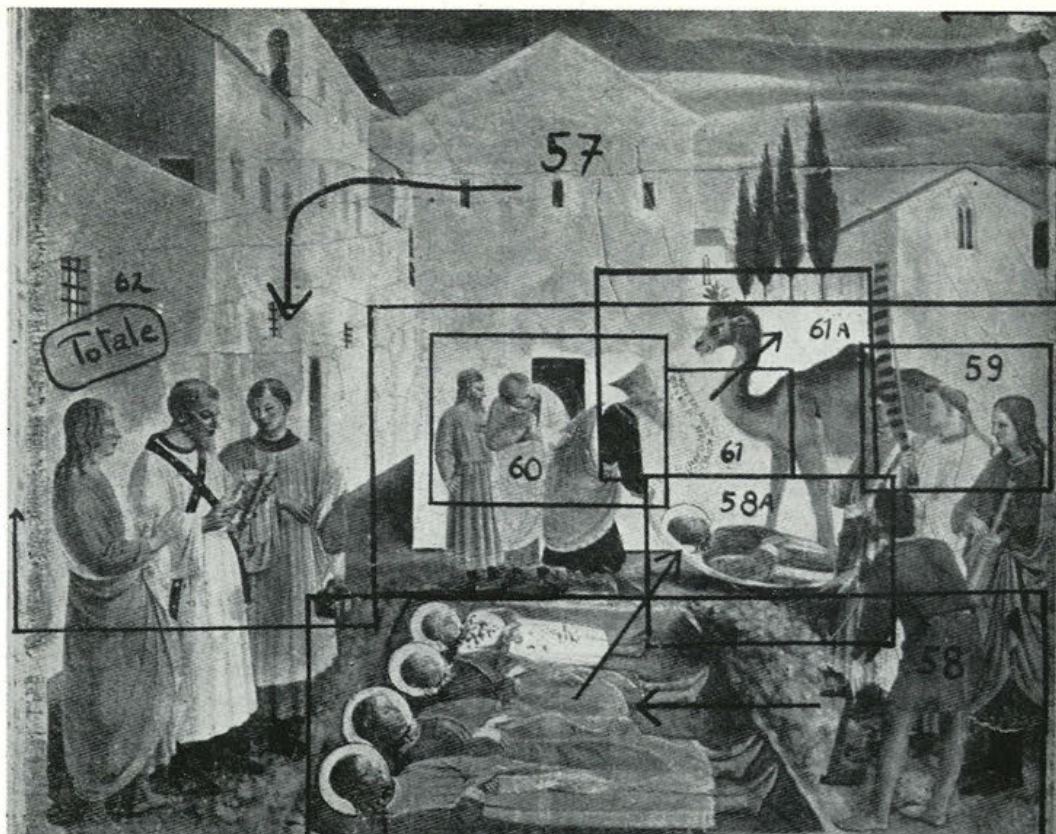
**FILMS ON ART: A Specialized Study, an International Catalogue.** (U.N.E.S.C.O., 19 Avenue Kléber, Paris, 5/-.)

THE TRANSLATION of this anthology of essays on films on art—originally published in French, sponsored by U.N.E.S.C.O. in collaboration with the Cinémathèque de Belgique and obtainable now from Unesco House, Paris—makes clear the extent of the cinema's flirtation with other visual arts during the last ten years. It contains some of the most illuminating accounts of the subject that have yet appeared.

It can be said that this relationship with painting has inspired, in a small way, a new movement of avant-garde in the cinema. Avant-garde activity in any medium has always two salient characteristics: cosmopolitanism, and an attempt to find intimate correspondences and working agreements between one art form and another. The flowering of the French avant-garde in the 20's was fertilised by music and psychology. Bunuel, Dali and Cocteau plunged into the subconscious and brought up some exciting new images, Germaine Dulac passed from toying with remnants of Freud to fitting abstract symbols to music: Cavalcanti used popular songs, films like *Romance Sentimentale* and *Nuit sur la Mont Chauve* essayed visual interpretations of music. In the last decade, there have been experiments of very varying merit in "cinematographic theatre"—Henry V, *Hamlet*, *Mourning Becomes Electra*, *Les Parents Terribles*, *Macbeth*, etc.—and, on a smaller scale which has allowed perhaps more freedom and more research, in "dramatised painting".

The first essay in this book, by René Micha (the script-writer of *Le Monde de Paul Delvaux*), provides a statement of principles. The cinema is primarily a realistic medium, the public and the critics are conditioned to and on the whole prefer realistic films: to approach painting (or the theatre) through the medium of films is tricky, and often means no more than subjecting the cinema to the procedures of other art forms. Very often the results have been at best tentative, at worst hopelessly bastardised.

The ordinary documentary, in effect an animated exhibition catalogue, does not offer much interest. The didactic film has been explored most notably in *Rubens* (Out of *Chaos* is probably better forgotten), by Haesaerts and Storck, which evolved a number of ingenious devices for analysing the painter's work, for comparing him with predecessors, but which was semi-nullified by the poverty of the makers' actual art criticism. In what has been called the "dramatisation of painting" the most successful results have occurred. In Micha's words, "the artists' world can be recreated by using elements of paintings or sculptures as actors and settings . . . The didactic film guides the spectator's eye and instructs him according to the method of literary criticism, but it has little to do with the cinema



Emmer's technical notes for his film of Fra Angelico's "Legend of Saints Cosmo and Damian." (From "Films on Art.")

considered as an art. The dramatic or lyric film, on the other hand, will sacrifice none of the cinema's own powers, and thus prefers on occasion to let the painting suffer".

As a statement of principles this is admirable, but what happens in practice is less clear-cut. The films of Luciano Emmer—*Dramma di Cristo* from Giotto, *Paradiso Perduto* from Bosch, *La Leggenda di S. Orsola* from Carpaccio—have probably come nearest to perfection. The best of them are films, and communicate the excitement of personal discovery. Storck's *Le Monde de Paul Delvaux* was an extraordinary fluke—a film in which the cinema really "took over" from painting and provided a drama and mystery lacking in the original works. *Van Gogh*, by Alain Resnais and Gaston Diehl, had the interesting idea of trying to tell the story of the painter's life by using his pictures narratively—but its emotional interpretation was vulgar, hysterical and misleading.

Emmer and Storck are the names usually quoted; but there are a great many others, covered in a comprehensive article by Paul Davay. Many of these are worthless. I have seen a number of films on painting by other Italian would-be Emmers, lacking in continuity, tension, and with no claim to be considered as cinema: the Belgian Cauvin, whom M. Davay finds of interest, produced a very dull *Memling*. The tedium attainable in this genre was illustrated in a talk by Iris Barry in London a few months ago, when she showed Emmer's *S. Orsola* and followed it (with suitable warning) by a film on the same paintings by an inferior director, badly photographed and without shape. Never have twelve minutes seemed so long.

M. Davay writes also of the experiments of Dekeukelaire in Belgium, and of Curt Oertel's *Michelangelo*, which one would like to see. For the rest, there is a good account of Emmer by Lauro Venturi, a contribution by Arthur

Knight about American activities in this sphere, including a note on Flaherty's unfinished *Guernica*, some first-rate stills and a useful catalogue. I would, however, make this reservation: in general the book tends to over-estimate the possibilities of the genre, and to over-rate a number of films, including *Rubens*, from which a script extract is included. The relationship of cinema and painting is a fascinating subject for exploration, and the achievements of Emmer are greatly to be admired (though I like even more his poetic films about Venice): but I do not think we can anticipate a fusion of the two arts of the almost operatic profundity that some of the writers imply. M. Davay remarks in his essay that the cinema and the other arts used to be divided "by mutual ignorance and scorn"—as if that were the only barrier, the only reason. But mutual respect for individuality is another.

GAVIN LAMBERT.

#### GOETHE UND DER FILM, by Heinrich Heining (Baden-Baden, Neue Verlags-Austalt, 1949)

This book is yet another contribution to the Goethe-literature which appeared during the bi-centenary year; but it covers quite different ground from most of its fellows. It traces, as far as possible throughout the whole history of the cinema, all the films which have been concerned with Goethe, either with his own life or with film representations of his works. The result is surprising,

especially for English film-goers, many of whom must have been unaware that Goethe and his works had been so frequently treated as subjects for the cinema: the answer being that the majority of Goethe-films were made in Germany and, for one reason or another, not shown in England.

The first Goethe-film was, however, a French one—Louis Lumière's *Faust*, in 1896. The book ranges from that earliest attempt of more than fifty years ago, to the present day and the biographical films planned for the bicentenary year by Curt Oertel, which unfortunately seem, for technical reasons, unlikely to be shown. One of the high lights is Murnau's *Faust* (1923/6), which the author considers most important and treats very fully. Another "Faust" film, of a much more spectacular kind, came more than twenty years later with the Italian production, *Faust e Margherita* (1948). Among other works filmed have been an early *Götz von Berlichingen* (1925), the *Erlkönig* (1930), *Liebesleute* (taken from "Hermann und Dorothea", in 1935), and a French production of *Werther* (1938). The previous centenary occasion (1932, the hundredth anniversary of Goethe's death) produced an interesting biographical film *Goethe lebt*, and a later film of the documentary type was *Karlsbader Reise* (1939).

The full illustrations and lively text form a valuable aid to film-goers in reconstructing these serious attempts of the past to deal with a great, if somewhat intractable, subject.

MURIEL GRINDROD.

## CORRESPONDENCE

### Operational Research

*The following letter arrived just after press deadline, and there is no space to reply to it in this issue. The Editor will answer it in March, and comments from readers on this (and any other subject) are invited.*

The Editor, SIGHT AND SOUND,

Sir,—Some readers may well have been puzzled by your reference in "Points of View", December, 1949, to "such cheeseparings as the [Rank] Organisation has recently dignified with the name of Operational Research (an enquiry into the relative costs of panning shots and straight cuts)".

Operational Research is the application of scientific commonsense to the answering of questions which must be answered before sound executive decisions on the best use of technical equipments and methods can be made; it will help towards economies, large and small, but its concern is with firm knowledge of the more important factors which govern effectiveness, efficiency and economy.

It was my good fortune to be concerned in the applications of Operational Research to wartime problems—and, incidentally, to give its name. Operational Research achieved its own dignity by saving many lives, very many manhours, and much money; it made substantial contributions towards victory. We believe that it is a valuable tool of industry, and that its war-won dignity is far from being impaired by its peacetime practice.

My Partnership, as scientific advisers to the J. Arthur Rank Organisation, has a small but skilled team engaged on Operational Research into film production. We are attempting to contribute part answers to such questions as these:—

1. To what extent and in what ways are the Independent Frame techniques economically and artistically valuable?
2. What are the relative places of Back Projection and of Travelling Mats as aids to artistically satisfactory and economically sound production?
3. What kinds of pre-planning are desirable, necessary and attainable without impairing artistic freedom?

4. How can the large fraction of total time in the studio which is spent in preparation and lighting of the set be reduced without disadvantage, or with positive advantage, to the fulfilment of the director's aims?

5. What help can Television-type aids give in the studio?

We are sure that you and your readers will agree that early, objective and dispassionate examination of such questions, including measurements wherever measurements can be made and interpreted, is especially appropriate to the present state of film making. We are sure that the Rank Organisation showed both wisdom for itself and concern for the health of the industry as a whole in initiating this work before the present crisis came in sight.

We take your antithesis between "panning shots and straight cuts" as arising from a misinterpretation of a part of one of our operational research analyses. We were interested in the length of time for which the filmgoer is called upon to look at one viewpoint on the screen either before the camera moves or before the cut occurs. We were, and are, interested in this because different production techniques may save production costs by altering the finished article. Such alteration may reduce costs but it may also reduce quality and, therefore, be undesirable. It was not with the naive idea of comparing the "relative costs" of camera movement on the one hand and the art of editing on the other, but because each process in itself was one of many significant factors in our main enquiry, that we undertook an analysis of viewpoint durations.

We are well aware that we cannot measure art by counting frames, but the recommendations of Sir George Gater's Working Party can only be fully implemented, without danger to quality and with assured overall improvement in the ratio of box office receipts to production costs, when the answers to some of the questions we have set ourselves are known. We should be grateful to you and your readers for constructive comment on how better we might help in this vital task of the film world than by our present patient gropings among things about which we still know very little—and about which much that is believed by others, of greater experience, cannot be of full value to the art and the industry until individual belief is converted into general knowledge.

Yours faithfully,

ROBERT WATSON-WATT.

# SUPPLEMENTS

## Documentary

### FLESH, FOWL, OR . . . ?

Basil Wright

THE REPUTATION of the National Film Board of Canada stands high in this country; its films (Norman McLaren, Robert Anderson's psychological studies, Gudrun Parker's *Children's Concert*, and many others) are admired, and its distribution system, both internal and external, has long been the envy of people who believe in the role of the film in education and in community service generally. The recent news of what appears to be a disastrous shake-up in N.F.B. has, therefore, caused a good deal of surprise and bewilderment here. These notes are an attempt to sort out what has been happening; they are based on a study of the Canadian *Hansard* and of clippings from the Canadian Press.

To begin with, it is necessary to remember the anti-Communist psychosis which is as prevalent in Canada as it is in the United States. In the case of Canada it dates from the famous spy trials of 1946, during which the Film Board came under heavy suspicion; ever since then there has been a tendency in some quarters to present the Board to the public as "a hot-bed of communism". The *Ottawa Citizen*, in a long article which appeared on December 28 last, pointed out that "other departments, where actual spies had been found, mysteriously escaped this sinister condemnation".

However that may be, a routine screening of personnel (undertaken in all government departments and agencies) was begun last May by that romantically named detective bureau, the Mounties, or Royal Canadian Mounted Police. At this writing there is no news of this screening having been completed, or the results published. In the meantime, N.F.B. continued its normal activities; and in July it submitted a brief to the Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters and Sciences (which is presided over by Mr. Vincent Massey). This brief made certain recommendations, of which the most important were that the Board should be granted an increase in budget, that it should be permitted to have a considerable say in the development of television, and that it should have its constitution amended so as to make it "a body corporate operating under appropriate review by Parliament". (At present, and hitherto, the Board has been answerable to Parliament through the cabinet minister who must, according to its constitution, be Chairman.) The N.F.B. brief is still before the Commission, which has not yet made its report.

Then in November there appeared in a Toronto paper called *The Financial Post* an article which stated, among other things, that "the department of National Defence no longer uses the Film Board on 'classified' (i.e., secret) work for security reasons". This was the beginning of

the storm. Questioned in the House on November 18, Mr. Claxton (Defence Minister) confirmed that this was so; and added that security films were being placed with outside commercial firms. This caused a torrent of surprised questioning, and it seems clear that the government at that point (suffering perhaps from that popular modern complaint, *Angst*) got itself into a muddle from which it has not yet extricated itself. Having first said that security films were being withheld from N.F.B. pending the R.C.M.P. screening, Claxton later implied that N.F.B. (a government body) had *never* been entrusted with work of a confidential nature. This appeared to be confirmed by the Prime Minister, who had to intervene in what became a rather heated episode. These implications—notably that the Government's own film department could not be trusted but that ordinary commercial firms could—not merely confused the issue, but also appeared to be far from the true facts; since it cannot be denied that N.F.B. was entrusted with the making of a film at Canada's atomic energy plant at Chalk River.

All this was, it would seem, grist to the mill of the commercial film companies, who were anxious to start a powerful lobby against N.F.B. on the grounds that it was a dangerous monopoly. At any rate, this aspect of the case was referred to by M.P.s during the full-dress debate on the Board, which took place on December 7. This debate ranged widely over the whole question of the Board: and a reading of *Hansard* does, it must be admitted, give the impression that the government—through Reconstruction Minister Winters (himself the Board's Chairman)—put up a weak and vacillating defence. Of the brief submitted to the Massey Commission, "I did not try to shape (it) to meet my views or the government's views", he said, "despite the fact that I was not in agreement with many of its recommendations". Mr. Drew, leader of the Progressive Conservatives (the main opposition party), retorted that such an attitude "is utterly inconsistent with the simplest basic propositions of our system of responsible government and joint governmental responsibility". Mr. Drew, during a brilliant and cogent speech, also remarked that the situation by which the Board, while entrusted with making a film at the ultra-secret Chalk River atomic plant, was forbidden to take films of the breech block of a gun, was far in excess of "all the fantastic nonsense this House has heard at any time during this session".

The debate cannot have done much good either to the government or the Film Board. In any case, one week

(Continued on page 47)

## WHERE ARE THE DOLLARS? (3)

Richard Griffith

BUILDING THE NEW AUDIENCE for British films will be a long business. Mr. McGinley tells me that the number of art theatres set at 18 by Weinberg four years ago has now multiplied to 56. Not much in terms of the mass market but it points a trend. And, says McGinley, there are upwards of 250 additional theatres which devote part of their playing time to European, notably British, films, and that this number increases as exhibitors watch queues form in front of rival theatres to see films which only a few years ago no one would book. Of course, the number of such theatres would have to multiply many times to represent a really substantial dollar gain for Britain. But there is no reason to believe that the theatres receptive to mature films will not go on increasing at a steady rate. The adult urban population of the country has shown a definite taste for good British films. If the trend continues, and extends to the small towns, it may have the most remarkable results both here and in Britain, provided distribution costs on this side continue to be kept low, and films of good quality reach us *in increasing quantities* from English studios. I stress the point because it relates to Mr. Rank's recent statements on production policy, to be discussed below.

Since it seems to be a matter of some concern in Britain, I should like at this point to state parenthetically my opinion that no particular blame attaches to Rank and his colleagues for the initial adventure in trying to storm the large theatre chains. No other method of distribution had even been tried in this country, and none was thought possible. The discovery and exploitation of the mature audiences which support the smaller houses was and is a true innovation, an occurrence to which we may one day look back as a landmark in the progress of the screen. The leaders of American show business acknowledge that the growing success of this method of operation astonishes them. One of the most noted of them, on hearing that the boys (not the masters) at his son's school were demanding to see *Henry V*, exclaimed: "I'd better get out of the business for a couple of years and think things over. I don't know what the public wants any more".\* Mr. McGinley, of Prestige, previously a film salesman for Universal for 22 years, says he "feels like an old-time general practitioner suddenly forced to turn specialist". It is greatly to the credit of the Rank organization, and to that of Universal and Eagle-Lion, that they embarked on this voyage of discovery in uncharted waters, and that they adapted themselves so quickly to what they found. It took courage firmly to turn their backs on the empty lure of big-time distribution and, with equal firmness, to confine costs to the minimum in order to make the maximum profit from the limited audiences which respond to British films. And, one must add, it took vision on the part of

Mr. Rank to allow his American agents to go their gait when they seemed to be abandoning the fields of major profit.

But applause ends abruptly here. The proceeding solution of the distribution problem will avail little unless it is backed up by a production policy geared to the actualities of the American situation rather than to the grandiose dreams which seem to have befuddled so many ever since the flash success of *The Private Life of Henry VIII*, more than fifteen years ago. Neither Rank nor Korda (nor the independents, to judge by *Temptation Harbor*) display any visible tendency to equate the budgets of their films with the American returns which experience indicates as probable. What they do display, and it is a source of astonishment to trade circles here, is a stubborn belief that if they spend enough money they can do about as they please. As one man who has worked in both London and Hollywood put it, "They spent money as though they were appealing to the mass market, but spent it on films which could only please the minority. They talked of the movies as an art form, revelled in fine critiques, sneered at Hollywood, sat back and beamed at West End applause—and were astonished, when the applause died down, to find that there was no money in the till. Their real difficulty is a psychological one. They seem to think that if they throw enough money around in pleasing their own tastes, they must automatically please all tastes. Hollywood goes about it just the other way round. Hollywood thinks of the foreign market first, believing that if a picture will go in the world at large, it will be sensational at home. Hollywood is export-minded. And if the American people are indeed to believe that export is Britain's great problem to-day, it would seem that English producers must acquire an export philosophy."

There are those in the United States who profess to believe that such a philosophy cannot take root in Britain. They say that you just can't make box office pictures on English soil, just as Spain produces no operas and the United States no symphonies. Something in the climate prevents. That this is historically incorrect is proved not only by occasional British successes but even more dramatically by M-G-M in making in Britain *A Yank At Oxford*, *The Citadel*, *Goodbye Mr. Chips* and *Edward, My Son*, all of which were enormously profitable in the American market. What *can* be said without fear of contradiction is that it is no use for American distributors of British films to milk the market of every possible dollar when more pounds have already been spent on production than could ever be regained. And what is needed is a cold analysis of the American box office potential of every picture, and the making of a budget commensurate with that potential. Such budgetary analysis is entirely feasible on the record of British successes and failures in the United States during the past five years. And experience shows that it gets results. Let me cite a brutally com-

\* Mr. David Selznick before the 40th Anniversary Conference of the National Board of Review of Motion Pictures, March, 1949.

mercial example gleaned from Leo C. Rosten's illuminating book, "Hollywood: The Movie Colony, The Movie Makers": "Nathan J. Blumberg, on taking over Universal in 1937-38 (just at the time Mr. Rank first associated himself with the company), reorganized the studio by placing two executives in charge who had been reared and trained in exhibition... The 'exhibitor boys' took over the studio with the intention of making pictures for definite markets. They were prepared to sacrifice art, egos, Academy awards, or kudos from the reviewers for box office results. It was a revolutionary venture in Hollywood..." Mr. Rosten goes on to point out that at this period Marlene Dietrich had been idle for two years because she customarily appeared in films costing more than a million dollars and her pictures, at that figure, were no longer profitable. But, he says, "the 'exhibitor boys' in charge of Universal did not 'make a Marlene Dietrich picture'. They said, 'We'll make a Marlene Dietrich picture for \$600,000'. Then they found the kind of story in which they believed Dietrich could attract an audience, and they insisted on making a picture from that story for the amount of money which, in their judgment, a Dietrich film justified as a cold business investment". The result was *Destry Rides Again*.

I should here emphasize that the conclusions above and to follow are my own. A notable dissenter from some of them is Mr. Jock Lawrence, who, as a principal begetter of the Rank policies in this country, deserves an attentive hearing. Mr. Lawrence is sceptical of my faith in the mature audience as the prime solution for British producers. He points to the fallacy of regarding the majority and minority audiences as mutually exclusive; why not make films for both—or rather for each (the whole of film history proves that it is indeed a fallacy to believe that you can consistently make films which will please both at once). He cites the initial success scored here by *The Blue Lagoon* as evidence that the heaviest box office formulæ still work, and are not the exclusive property of any one country. Above all, he warns of the dangers inherent in the search for panaceas. To tell British studios to make pictures exclusively for this or that section of the audience is, he feels, to clap the producer into a creative strait-jacket. If the pictures are good, he believes they will find their own market. Here speaks the imaginative and resourceful showman, to whom every picture is a new problem and each problem an exciting stimulus. To an extent I agree. Success in the entertainment field owes more to palmistry than science, and second-guessing is easy. Nevertheless, I feel that the experience of recent years makes it possible to lay down certain policy lines with confidence. If a British producer were to ask my advice, I should offer him, not doctrines, but certain ideas and conclusions to keep by him as a touchstone. I should say:

(1) Your basic American audience seems to consist of people of mature years whom Hollywood now ignores. If, at low cost, you produce and distribute films of adult experience (*Brief Encounter*), films which bring to the screen the novelty of distant landscapes and unfamiliar ways of life (*I Know Where I'm Going*, *Tawny Pipit*), or films embodying the "favourite recreation of noble minds" (*Green For Danger*), you can be assured of creditable returns. If your low-cost picture turns out to be of the highest quality, it may break out of the "class" houses into the mass market. But you cannot count on this. The better part of valour is to keep your costs low and see to it that

your American distributor does likewise.

(2) If you *must* make expensive films, think twice and three times about subject matter. The only British pictures which have come anywhere near capturing the American mass market have been those, like *Hamlet*, *Henry V* and *Great Expectations*, which exploit the cultural inheritance America and Britain hold in common, or explore new cultural fields, like *Red Shoes*. What cannot possibly succeed here are rootless fantasies like *Odd Man Out* and *Stairway To Heaven*, and empty historical pageants like *Saraband* and *The Magic Bow*. Such pictures appeal neither to the majority nor to any sizeable portion of the mature audience. They are for the chi-chi few, whose cultural inferiority complex responds to the snob-value of West End accents and the traditions of the English theatre.

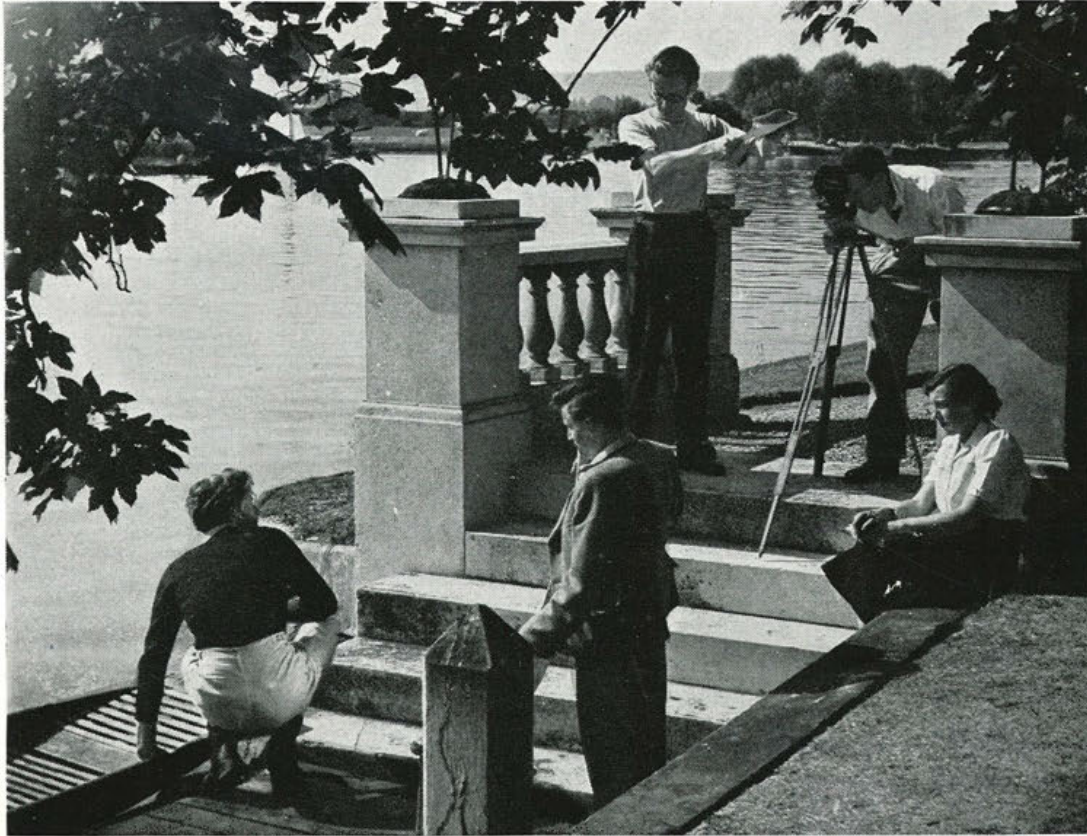
(3) Whatever you do, keep them coming. I say this advisedly. Mr. Rank, in his last discussion of retrenchment, announced that his units would henceforth make very few pictures in order to concentrate on quality. Perhaps this is all right. Quality is much to be sought and seldom to discover. But, on the record, the word seems to have been principally associated, in the British studios as elsewhere, with bigness and expense. I cannot help hearing an echo of this attitude in Mr. Rank's words, nor avoid catching a glimpse of the will-o'-the-wisp of mass distribution flickering ahead. In any case, it would be disastrous to the achievements of the film salesmen here if the flow of British films slowed down. The string of small theatres which have been playing them cannot hold the audiences they have attracted (nor themselves increase in number) unless sufficient films are available to them. I find significant in this connection the dilemma of I. E. Lopert, who controls the largest national chain of "art" houses. In recent weeks, he has with great difficulty induced Paramount to re-issue to him a large number of its old films, dating as far back as 1930. Mr. Lopert has explained to the trade press that he was forced to do this because he could not obtain sufficient films, either from Britain or the Continent, to keep his theatres going. I think this speaks for itself. If the Lopert chain, the very citadel of modest-budget British films, cannot keep alive on the product now arriving, how can the distributors of English product, with the best will in the world, expand the audience they have so laboriously cultivated?

All this advice is doubtless impertinent; it is certainly unsolicited; and it is not the kind of advice I am accustomed, or like, to give. I am a lover of films. Transcriptions of classic plays and novels, however workmanlike and tasteful, seem to me a minimal and academic use of the medium. I should prefer to see the growth of a British film style and tradition comparable to the achievements of the other great film-making countries. I should prefer to see the face of Britain rendered in true film terms, as happened in *The Stars Look Down*. But since that notable film has had no issue, even from its own creator, and since mature people in the United States have demonstrated a taste for British films along certain lines, it has seemed best to give a purely commercial analysis of the situation. In any event, if Britain does no more than send us films on adult themes, produced and distributed (my King Charles's Head) at reasonable cost, she will have achieved something beyond redressing her dollar balance. She will have performed a service to America in bringing back into the movie theatres thinking people who had come to the belief that the movie was an enemy of thought.

# Amateur Activities

## FILM MAKERS IN SEARCH OF AN AUDIENCE

Tony Rose



*The High Wycombe Film Unit during the making of "Paper Boat."*

IT HAS BEEN STATED by more or less responsible critics, from time to time, that the film is a folk-art; that it belongs to the people and therefore has great reserves of vitality and so forth. This optimistic view is based on the fact that a lot of people go to the cinema. Which is queer logic. (If twenty-five million people started visiting the art galleries each week, would that prove that painting is a folk art?)

A folk art depends for its existence on contact between consumer and producer and the consumer must be a producer. In the cinema there is absolutely no contact. Film fans know even less about film production than people who visit galleries know about painting.

You and I, when we sit in the darkness passively watching a film, are not a source of vitality. To the people who made the film we are nothing. We contribute nothing except our cash at the box office. The only way in which we can influence them at all is by stopping away, withholding our one and ninepences. And that is a fairly negative influence.

Films may be for but they are certainly not of the people. Between producer and consumer there is a great gulf fixed. That gulf can only be bridged, if at all, by the amateur film movement, of which—let me confess at once—I happen to be a member.

At present there are in Britain a hundred and twenty amateur cine clubs actively engaged in production—not to mention countless lone workers. In last year's "ten best" contest, organised by the *Amateur Cine World*, there were a hundred and ninety-eight entries.

Amateur films range from purely personal records of seaside holidays and children in the back garden, through regional documentaries to full-blown features. The latter may run anything from fifteen to fifty minutes and employ the talents of a dozen or so technicians and actors.

By professional standards they are bound to look pretty crude. The cost of a professional feature still ranges between £100,000 and £200,000, whereas few cine clubs can afford to budget for more than £100. Usually the cost is far less—*Full Circle*, the first amateur film I scripted, was made for £16.

This means that the amateur works and hopes to succeed only within well defined limits. The expense of sound-on-film recording puts it beyond the reach of all but a few wealthy clubs. So dialogue is out, for a start. (Sound usually consists of music or a non-synchronous commentary recorded on discs.) The cost of film stock limits the length of the picture and keeps the number of retakes down to a bare minimum. Thus the amateur script writer must express his ideas quickly and express them in purely visual terms, which is not a bad thing. It compels him to recognise one basic principle—that in movie-making, movement counts for much.

Here then, at least, is a potential source of vitality. Here are some twelve thousand individuals making films for the love of it. With no distribution contracts to secure and no fear of box office failure, we are free to experiment and let ourselves go on new ideas. The trouble is that we lack an audience.

We make our films in the summer and show them, perhaps, once to a local audience of a few hundred people, and in the winter pass them around to other amateur cine clubs for criticism. Apart from this exchange system there is no easy method of distribution open to us. The vast majority of the twenty-five million weekly cinemagoers have not only never seen an amateur film but are probably unaware that such things exist.

Very well, we are not concerned about "box office." But every film is made with some kind of an audience in view. And at present, whether consciously or not, we are tending to make films for our fellow technicians. That way lies madness.

Already it has led to the kind of attitude expressed with disarming honesty by Denys Davies, president of the fecund Fourfold Film Unit, who says: "We don't care a damn what our films are about. We don't have any message to offer. The subjects aren't important—so long

as they give us a chance to make interesting gadgets and experiment with new effects".

This statement is not really surprising. What is surprising is that an amateur film which is something more than a bag of technical tricks does occasionally get made. Such a one is *A Tribute To Richard Jeffries*, a sincere and pictorially pleasing little piece by the Swindon Public Library Film Unit which is exactly what its title says. So, too, in a very different vein is Ace Movies' macabre fantasy, *Marionettes*.

Indeed, the best amateur films have a fresh integrity, an exciting hit-or-miss vitality which the professionals seldom achieve. They deserve a wider audience and one that is able to judge them on other than technical grounds.

The film societies, which have already succeeded in popularising foreign films in the provinces, could do much towards providing such an audience. It is an odd and regrettable fact that they have so far shown very little inclination to do so. The Federation of film societies has included one or two amateur films in its annual viewing sessions but bookings have been extremely sparse.

Lack of publicity and inertia on the part of the cine clubs is no doubt partly responsible. But there are signs of a more vigorous policy. *Amateur Cine World* is sponsoring free distribution of its ten best selection to clubs and societies with the proviso that a minimum audience of two hundred be assembled for each performance. The films are fully booked for six months ahead and it is estimated that by the end of the winter season ten thousand people will have seen them.

Much remains to be done by direct liaison between the film societies and cine clubs. They are natural allies who seem to be held apart by some obscure kind of mutual distrust. Together they could bring new life to the British screen, perhaps go some of the way toward justifying that optimistic claim that the Film is a folk art.

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(Flesh, Fowl, or . . . ?—continued from page 43)

later the government "declined to continue" Ross McLean, the Film Commissioner, in his post. The editor of a very popular journal called (rather muddling, this) *Macleans*—a gentleman named Art Irwin—was made Commissioner, and Ross McLean was given the choice of serving under him in a subordinate capacity or getting out. He not unnaturally chose the latter course, and has been appointed Head of Unesco's Film Section in Paris. On this the *Ottawa Citizen* comments that it is "a sort of retributive justice". It adds: "In letting him go, the government reflects not on Mr. McLean's abilities . . . but on its own lack of courage in refusing to defend one of its most valuable agencies whose activities have come under fire from powerful private interests".

Writing on the other side of the Atlantic one cannot say whether this viewpoint is correct; one can only note

that the opposite point of view seems unsupported by any actual evidence. It may perhaps turn out that the R.C.M.P. will report that the Board is full of Joe Stalin's boys and girls; but surely they could have found that out at the time of the spy trials in 1946, and prevented any spies enrolling with the Board since then?

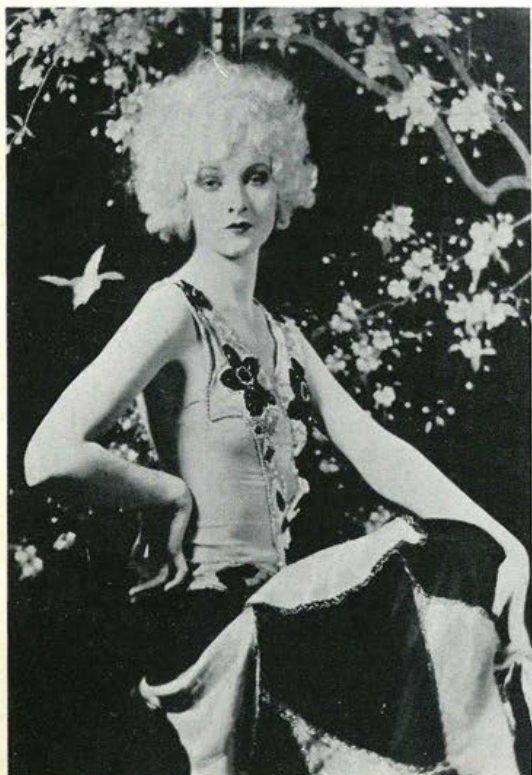
Whatever the rights and wrongs of the case, one is bound to sympathise with Ross McLean on the method and manner of his dismissal, which in itself may well alarm public servants as well as make us fear for the creative future of N.F.B. The staff of the Film Board, meanwhile, must continue to live and work under "a vast slur" until the government and the Mounties have made up their minds. Mr. Art Irwin, the new Commissioner, should also be granted some sympathy; he takes over under exceptionally unfortunate circumstances.

## COMPETITION

From this month, a Competition will be a regular feature of SIGHT AND SOUND—in visual form as often as possible, as this seems appropriate and discourages addicts of the reference books.

No. 1. Below are pictures of six actors and actresses distinguished on the American screen to-day. At the time of these pictures they

were not so distinguished. Can you recognise them? Prize for the first correct solution to be opened, a book token to the value of 25s.; runner-up, 10s. 6d. Closing date, March 6th. Entries to SIGHT AND SOUND, British Film Institute, 164, Shaftesbury Avenue, W.C.2, with "Competition" marked on left-hand top corner of envelope.



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